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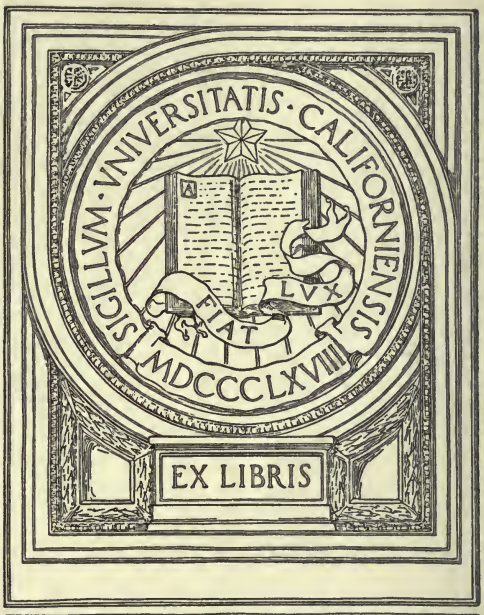

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THE

WIDOW BARNABY.

VOL. I.

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THE

WIDOW BARNABY.

BY FRANCES TROLLOPE,

AUTHOR OF

"THE VICAR OF WREXHILL," "A ROMANCE OF VIENNA," ETC.

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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1839.

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THE WIDOW BARNABY.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION TO THE FAMILY OF THE FUTURE MRS. BARNABY. — FINANCIAL DIFFICULTIES. — MATERNAL LOVE.—PREPARATIONS FOR A FETE.

Miss Martha Compton, and Miss Sophia Compton, were, some five-and-twenty years ago, the leading beauties of the pretty town of Silverton in Devonshire.

The elder of these ladies is the person I propose to present to my readers as the heroine of my story; but, ere she is placed before them in the station assigned her in my title-page, it will be necessary to give some slight sketch of her early youth, and also such brief notice of her family as may suffice to make the subsequent events of her life, and the persons connected with them, more clearly understood.

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The Reverend Josiah Compton, the father of my heroine and her sister, was an exceedingly worthy man, though more distinguished for the imperturbable tranquillity of his temper, than either for the brilliance of his talents or the profundity of his learning. He was the son of a small landed proprietor at no great distance from Silverton, who farmed his own long-descended patrimony of three hundred acres with skilful and unwearied industry, and whose chief ambition in life had been to see his only son Josiah privileged to assume the prefix of *reverend* before his name. After three trials, and two failures, this blessing was at last accorded, and his son ordained, by the help of a very good-natured examining chaplain of the then Bishop of Exeter.

This rustic, laborious, and very happy Squire lived to see his son installed Curate of Silverton, and blessed with the hand of the dashing Miss Martha Wisett, who, if her pedigree was not of such respectable antiquity as that of her bridegroom, had the glory of being accounted the handsomest girl at the Silverton balls; and

if her race could not count themselves among the landed gentry, she enjoyed all the consideration that a fortune of one thousand pounds could give, to atone for any mortification which the accident of having a *ci-devant* tallow-chandler for her parent might possibly occasion.

But, notwithstanding all the pride and pleasure which the Squire took in the prosperity of this successful son, the old man could never be prevailed upon by all Mrs. Josiah's admirable reasonings on the rights of primogeniture, to do otherwise than divide his three hundred acres of freehold in equal portions between the Reverend Josiah Compton his son, and Elizabeth Compton, spinster, his daughter.

It is highly probable, that had this daughter been handsome, or even healthy, the proud old yeoman might have been tempted to reduce her portion to the charge of a couple of thousand pounds or so upon the estate; but she was sickly, deformed, and motherless; and the tenderness of the father's heart conquered the desire which might otherwise have been strong within him, to keep together the fields which

for so many generations had given credit and independence to his race. To leave his poor little Betsy in any degree dependent upon her fine sister-in-law, was, in short, beyond his strength; so the home croft, and the long fourteen, the three linny crofts, the five worthies, and the ten-acre clover bit, together with the farm-house and all its plenishing, and one half of the live and dead farming stock, were bequeathed to Elizabeth Compton and her heirs for ever—not perhaps without some hope, on the part of her good father, that her heirs would be those of her reverend brother, also; and so he died, with as easy a conscience as ever rocked a father to sleep.

But Mrs. Josiah Compton, when she became Mrs. Compton, with just one half of the property she anticipated, waxed exceeding wroth; and though her firm persuasion, that "the hideous little crook-back could not live for ever," greatly tended to console and soothe her, it was not without very constant reflections on the necessity of keeping on good terms with her, lest she might make as "unnatural a will

as her father did before her," that she was enabled to resist the temptation of abusing her openly every time they met; a temptation increased, perhaps, by the consciousness that Miss Betsy held her and all her race in the most sovereign contempt.

Betsy Compton was an odd little body, with some vigour of mind, and frame too, notwithstanding her deformity; and as the defects in her constitution shewed themselves more in her inability to endure fatigue, than in any pain or positive suffering, she was likely to enjoy her comfortable independence considerably longer, and considerably more, than her sister thought it at all reasonable in Providence to permit.

The little lady arranged her affairs, and settled her future manner of life, within a very few weeks after her father's death, and that without consulting brother, sister, or any one else; yet it may be doubted if she could have done it better had she called all the parish to counsel.

She first selected the two pleasantest rooms in the house for her bed-room and sitting-

room, and then skilfully marked out the warmest and prettiest corner of the garden, overlooking some of her own rich pastures, with the fine old grey tower of Silverton in the distance, as the place of her bower, her flower-garden, and her little apiary. She then let the remainder of her house, and the whole of her well-conditioned dairy-farm, for three hundred pounds a-year, with as much waiting upon as she might require, as much cream, butter, milk, and eggs, as she should use, and as much fruit and vegetables as her tenants could spare—together with half a day's labour every week for her tiny flower-garden.

She had no difficulty in finding a tenant upon these terms; the son of a wealthy farmer in the neighbourhood had a bride ready as soon as he could find a farm-house to put her into, and a sufficient dairy upon which to display her well-learned science. Miss Betsy's homestead was the very thing for them. The bride's portion was five hundred pounds for the purchase of the late Squire Compton's furniture and the half of his fine stock of cows,

&c. &c. the which was paid down in Bank of England notes within ten minutes after the lease was signed, and being carefully put into the funds by Miss Betsy, became, as she said to herself (but to nobody else), a sort of nest egg, which, as she should only draw out the interest to lay it in again in the shape of principal, would go on increasing till she might happen to want it; so that, upon the whole, the style and scale of her expenses being taken into consideration, it would have been difficult to find any lady, of any rank, more really and truly independent than Miss Betsy.

She felt this, and enjoyed it greatly. Now and then, indeed, as she remembered her old father, and his thoughtful care for her, her sharp black eyes would twinkle through a tear; but there was more softness than sorrow in this; and a more contented, or, in truth, a more happy spinster might have been sought in vain, far and near, notwithstanding her humped back.

Far different was the case of those who inherited the other moiety of the estate called

Compton Basett. The reverend Josiah, indeed, was himself too gentle and kind-hearted to feel anger against his father, or a single particle of ill-will towards his sister; yet was he as far from sharing her peace and contentment as his disappointed and vituperative wife. How, indeed, can any man hope to find peace and contentment, even though he has passed the rubicon of ordination, and has been happy enough to marry the favourite flirt of ten successive regiments, if he be never permitted to close his eyes in sleep till he has been scolded for an hour, and never suffered to wake at any signal, save the larum of his lady's tongue.

It was in vain that day and night he continued submissively to reiterate the phrases, "to be sure, my dear," .... "certainly," .... "there is no doubt of it," .... "he ought not to have done so, my love," .... "you are quite right, my dear," .... and the like. All this, and a great deal more, submission and kindness was in vain; Mrs. Compton's complainings ceased not, and, what was harder still, she always contrived by some ingenious mode of

reasoning to prove that all the mischief which had happened was wholly and solely her husband's fault.

Mean while the two little girls sent to bless this union of masculine softness and feminine hardness, grew on and prospered, as far as animal health went, just as much as if their father were not taking to smoking and hot toddy as a consolation for all his sorrows, or their mother to a system of visiting and gossiping, which left her no time, had she possessed the talent, to do more for their advantage than take care that they had enough to eat. They were very fine on Sundays, or whenever their ma' expected company; and not too dirty at other times to pass muster at the day-school, at which they were destined to receive all the education which fate intended for them.

Miss Betsy, little as she admired her sister-in-law, and dearly as she loved her sunny garden in summer and her snug chimney-corner in winter, now and then left both to pass a few hours in Silverton; for she loved her brother, despite the weakness of character which ap-

peared to her keen faculties to be something very nearly approaching fatuity; and being as well aware as the prettiest young lady in the town could be, that she was herself totally unfit to be married, she looked to his children with the interest with which human beings are apt to consider those who must become the possessors of all they leave behind.

For many years Miss Betsy looked forward with hope for one of two greatly desired events. That most coveted was the death of her sister-in-law; the other, and for many years the most probable, was the birth of a male heir to her brother.

But time wore away, and both were abandoned. Had it been otherwise, had Miss Betsy seen a male Compton ready to unite in his own person all the acquired and inherited honours of his twaddling father, and all the daily increasing hoard that she was herself accumulating, her temper of mind would probably have been very different. As it was, she looked upon the little girls as much more belonging to their mother than to their father; and the

steady thriftiness, which, had it been pursued for the sake of a nephew, would have had some mixture of generous devotion in it, now that its result could only benefit nieces, by no means very dearly loved, seemed to threaten the danger of her becoming saving for mere saving's sake.

There was, however, in the heart of Miss Betsy much to render such an incrustation of character difficult; but there was also much to displease her in those who alone could claim her kindness on the plea of kindred; so that the most acute observer might have been at a loss to say what tone her vexed temper might finally take towards them.

Nevertheless, the two young sisters, at the respective ages of fifteen and seventeen, were as forward and handsome girls as ever drew the attention of a country town. They were equally handsome, perhaps, though very unlike. Martha was tall, dark-eyed, fresh-coloured, bold-spirited, and believed in her heart that she was to be called "my lady," and to drive in a coach and four. Sophia, the younger girl,

was less tall and less bright-coloured; her hair was light, and her eyes, though their lashes were black, were of the softest grey. Her chief beauty, however, consisted in a complexion of great delicacy, and a mouth and teeth that could hardly be looked at without pleasure, even by cross Miss Betsy herself.

Miss Martha Compton was a young lady endowed with a vast variety of brilliant talents. She could dance every night, and very nearly all night long, though she had only learned for six weeks; she could make pasteboard card-boxes and screens, work satin-stitch, and (like most other clever young ladies bred in a country town abounding with officers) quote the oft profaned lyrics of Tom Moore.

The reputation of her sister for talents rested on a basis much less extended; it would indeed have been a false concord to talk of her talents, for she had but one in the world. Untaught, and unconscious of the power nature had bestowed, she sang with the sweet shrillness of the lark, and had science been set to work upon her for six months, Silverton might have boast-

ed one of the finest native voices in the kingdom.

Mrs. Compton was proud of both her daughters, and however difficult it might be to procure shoes and gloves out of an income of somewhat less than four hundred pounds a-year, the winter balls of Silverton never opened till the Miss Comptons were ready to stand up.

Had she been a little less brutally cross to her poor husband, Mrs. Compton would really at this time have been almost interesting from the persevering industry and ingenuity with which she converted the relics of her own maiden finery into fashionable dancing-dresses for her girls. And on the whole the Miss Comptons were astonishingly well-dressed; for, besides the above-mentiond hoards, every article of the family consumption was made to contribute to the elegance of their appearance. Brown sugar was substituted for white at the morning and the evening meal; the butcher's bills were kept down wonderfully by feeding the family upon tripe twice a-week . . . . the home-brewed was lowered till the saving in

malt for one year bought two glazed calico slips, four pair of long white gloves, and a bunch of carnations for Martha and of lilies for Sophia. Nothing, in short, was over-looked or forgotten that could be made to distil one drop of its value towards decorating the beauties of Silverton.

Few subjects have furnished more various or more beautiful images for the poet's pen than maternal fondness. From the heart-stirring fury of the dauntless lioness when her young ones are threatened, down to the patient hen red-breast as she sits abrood, lonely, fasting, and apart from all the joys of birdhood, awaiting the coming life of her loved nestlings . . . . in short, from one extremity of animal creation to the other, volumes of tender anecdotes have been collected illustrative of this charming feature of female nature ; and yet much still remains to be said of it. Where is the author who has devoted his power of looking into the human heart, to the task of describing the restless activity, the fond watchfulness, the unwearied industry of a proud, poor, tender

mother, when labouring to dress her daughters for a ball? Who has told of the turnings, the dyings, the ironings, the darnings, that have gone to make misses of ten pounds a-year pin-money look as smart as the squanderer of five hundred? Yet such things are: the light of morning never steals into the eyes of mortals to spur them on again to deeds of greatness after nightly rest, without awaking many hundred mothers whose principal business in life is to stitch, flounce, pucker, and embroider for their daughters! . . . . All this is very beautiful! . . . . I speak not of the stitching, flouncing, puckering, and embroidering . . . . but of the devotion of the maternal hearts dedicated to it . . . . All this is very beautiful! . . . . yet never has gifted hand been found to bring forth in delicate penciling, traits such as these with half the study that has been often bestowed on the painting a cobweb. This is unjust.

Great, however, as were Mrs. Compton's exertions for the establishment of her daughters by the ways and means above described, her maternal efforts were not confined to these:

for their sakes she on one occasion armed herself for an enterprise which, notwithstanding the resolute tone of her character, cost her some struggles. This desperate undertaking, which was nothing less than the penetrating to the rarely-invaded retreat of Miss Betsy, for the purpose of asking her to give the girls a little money, was occasioned by a great event in the annals of Silverton.

The officers of the —— regiment, a detachment of which had been quartered there for a twelvemonth, gallantly determined to give the neighbouring families a fête before they left the town, in return for the hospitalities they had received. I am writing of the year 1813, a period when the palmy days of country quarters still existed, and many may still remember the tender sensibilities excited by a departing regiment, and the gay hopes generated by an arriving one. Either of these events were well-calculated to chase the composure of spirits arising from the unbroken routine of ordinary existence, and it may easily be imagined that, upon an occasion where the

effects of both were brought to act upon the hearts and souls of a set of provincial fair ones at the same moment, the emotions produced must have been of no ordinary nature.

Such was the case at the fête given by the first battalion of the —— regiment on their leaving Silverton; for, as it chanced that they were to be replaced by the second battalion of the same corps, the compliment intended for the neighbourhood was so arranged as to be shared by the officers who were about to be introduced to it; and thus an immense mass of joys and sorrows, regrets and hopes, tears and smiles, all came into action at once; and volumes might be filled in the most interesting manner, solely in describing the states of mind produced in the most charming portion of the inhabitants of twenty-seven of the principal houses of Silverton and its vicinity.

"It was so quite unlike any other party that ever was given," as Mrs. Compton well observed, in talking over the matter with her daughters, "that it was downright impossible not to make some difference in the way of preparing for it."

"Different! . . . . I believe it is different!" exclaimed Miss Martha; "it is the first ball we ever showed ourselves at by daylight, and I should like to know how we, that always lead everything, are to present ourselves in broad sunshine with dyed pink muslin and tarnished silver?"

"You can't and you shan't," replied her affectionate mother, "if I sell the silver spoons and buy plated ones instead. . . . . I will *not* have my girls disgraced in the face of two regiments at once. But, upon my life, girls, money is not to be had for the asking; for truth it is, and no lie, that there is not above twenty pounds in the bank to last till Michaelmas, and the butcher has not been paid these five months. But don't look glum, Martha! . . . . Shall I tell you what I have made up my mind to do?"

"Carry a plate round the mess-room, mamma, when they are all assembled, perhaps," replied the lively young lady, "and if you asked for aid for the sake of our bright eyes, it is likely enough you might get something; but if it is not that, what is it, mother?"

"Why, I will walk over to Compton Basett, Martha, and ask the ram's-horn, your aunt, for five pounds outright, and tell her into the bargain what it is for, and, stingy and skinflint as she is, I can't say that I shall be much surprised if she gives it; for she is as proud as she 's ugly; and it won't be difficult to make her see, this time, that I am asking more for credit's sake than for pleasure."

"Go, mother, by all means," replied the young lady with a sneer, that seemed to indicate despair of any aid from Miss Betsy. "All I know is, that she never gave me anything since I was born but a bible and prayer-book, and it don't strike me as very likely she 'll begin now. Set off, however, by all manner of means, and if you come back empty-handed, I 'll tell you what my scheme shall be."

"Tell me now, Martha," said the mother. "It 's no joke, I can tell you, striding over the hill this broiling day. I don't want to go for nothing, I promise you. Tell us your scheme, girl, at once."

"Why, if I was you, mother, I would go to

Smith's shop, and tell him confidentially that I wanted a little more credit, and that everything would be sure to be settled at Christmas."

"That won't do, Martha Compton. Your father has given him a bill already for thirty pounds, due in November, and it is a chance if it gets honoured, I promise you. Smith knows too much about our money matters to be caught napping."

"Well then, set off, mother! I 'd offer to go with you, only I know that Captain Tate will be sure to be walking on the Hatherton Road, and I shouldn't wonder yet if he was to come out with a proposal."

"Oh! never mind me, child, I can go alone, and that 's what you can't do, my dear. . . . . You must take Sophy with you, mind that, and don't get talked of just as the new set are coming in."

"Nay, for that matter, Sophy will be as likely to meet Willoughby as I shall be to meet Tate, so there is no fear I should have to go alone."

"Well! . . . . take care of yourselves, and don't let the sun get to tan your necks, mind that."

Having given these parting injunctions, Mrs. Compton set forth upon her expedition, the result of which shall be given in the next chapter.

CHAPTER II.

A SISTERLY VISIT, AND A CHEERFUL RECEPTION.—THE RETREAT OF A RURAL HEIRESS.—INTERESTING CONVERSATION.—AN UNSATISFACTORY LETTER.

Mrs. Compton said no more than the truth, when she declared that it was no joke to walk from Silverton to Compton Basett in the dog-days. A long shadeless hill was to be mounted, several pastures, beautifully open to the sun, with all their various stiles, were to be conquered, and finally a rough stony lane, that might have crippled the hoof of a jackass, was to be painfully threaded before she could find herself at Miss Betsy's door. Yet all this she undertook, and all this she performed, strengthened by the noble energy of maternal love.

On reaching at length the comfortable, well-conditioned abode of her husband's rural an-

cestors, she so far suspended her steadfast purpose as to permit herself to drop into a deliciously cool woodbine-covered seat in the porch, and there indulged the greatly-needed luxuries of panting and fanning herself at her ease for a few minutes, before she set to work on the stony heart of the spinster.

Just as she was beginning to think that it was time her rest should end, and her important labour begin, a curly-headed little girl, of some eight or nine years old, came from the house, and very civilly asked her "What she pleased to want?"

"I want to see Miss Betsy . . . . can't you go to her, my little girl, and tell her that her sister, Mrs. Compton, is come to pay her a visit?"

"Yes, ma'am," replied the child, "there she is, you can see her, if you please to look this way . . . . there . . . . at the end of the long walk, where you see the bit of grass-plat and the two elm trees. Miss Betsy always sits in her bower in a sun-shiny morning watching the bees."

"Well! . . . . trot away to tell her Mrs. Compton is coming, and then she won't be surprised, you know."

The child did as she was bid, tripping lightly along a well-kept gravel walk which led to the grass-plat, while Mrs. Compton followed with sedater step behind.

How the announcement of her arrival was received by the little spinster she could not judge, though she was at no great distance when it was made; but her messenger having entered beneath the flowery shelter of Miss Betsy's bower, both parties were effectually concealed from her sight, and despite the profound contempt she constantly expressed for the "little fright," she paused at some paces from the entrance, to await the child's return.

The interval was not long; but though her little envoy speedily reappeared, she brought no message, and silently pointing to the bower, ran back towards the house.

Mrs. Compton looked after her, as if she had rather she would have remained; but she called her courage (of which she had usually a

very sufficient stock) to aid her in meeting "the ugly little body's queer ways," and marched forward to the encounter.

A few steps brought her to the front of Miss Betsy's bower, and there she saw the still happy heiress seated on a bench, which, though it might upon occasion hold two persons, had nevertheless very much the comfortable air of an arm-chair, with a last year's new novel on a little table before her (a subscription to a library at Exeter being one of her very few expensive indulgences).

Miss Betsy's dress was always as precisely neat and nice as that of a quaker; and on the present occasion no bonnet concealed the regular plaiting of her snow-white muslin cap, which, closely fitting round her pale but intelligent features, was so peculiarly becoming, that her visitor muttered in her heart, "She can dress herself up, nasty crooked little thing, and we shall soon see if she has generosity enough to make her nieces look half as smart."

"Good morning to you, sister Betsy," it was thus she began the difficult colloquy that she

was come to hold. "You look charming well to-day, with your beautiful cap, and your pretty arbour, and your book, and your arm-chair, and all so very snug and comfortable. . . . . Ah, goodness me! nobody knows but those who have tried, what a much finer thing it is to be single than married!"

"Did you come all the way from Silverton, Mrs. Compton, to tell me that?" said the lady of the bower, pointing to a stool that stood at the entrance.

"Why no, sister Betsy, I can't say I did," replied Mrs. Compton, seating herself. "I am come upon an errand not over agreeable, I assure you—neither more nor less than to talk of your poor brother's troubles and difficulties; and what is worst of all, I don't feel over sure that you will care anything about it."

"And what makes you think that, Mrs. Compton?" said Miss Betsy in a sort of cheerful, clear voice, that certainly did not evince any painful acuteness of sympathy.

"How can I think that you care much about him, or any of us, sister Betsy, since 'tis

months and months that you have never come near us? . . . . I am sure we often talk of you, and wish you would be a little more sociable."

"That is exceedingly obliging, Mrs. Compton," replied Miss Betsy in the same cheering, happy tone of voice, "and I should be very wrong not to oblige you, if I could fancy that my doing so could be of any real use or service. But to tell you the truth, I suspect that my poor brother likes to have a better dinner when I am at table than when I am not; and if all 's true that gossips tell about his butcher's bill, that can be neither right nor convenient; . . . . and as for you, Mrs. Compton, and the young ladies, I greatly doubt if my frequent appearance among you would contribute much to your intimacy with the officers."

"You talk very strangely, sister Betsy. . . . I am sure I was not thinking of the officers at all, but only of how glad we always were to see you."

"That is very kind, indeed!" replied the provoking spinster in the same happy voice; "and I assure you that I do believe my bro-

ther likes to see me very much, and what is more remarkable still, I have more than once fancied that my niece Sophy looked rather pleased when I came in."

"And so did Martha, I am sure, ... and so did I, sister Betsy; you can't deny that: . . . . then why don't you come to see us oftener?"

"For no reason in the world," replied Miss Betsy gaily, "but because I like to stay at home better."

"So much the worse for us, ... so much the worse for us, sister Betsy. . . . If you had been to see us, you must have found out what I am now come to tell you, and that is, that poor dear Josiah is in very great difficulty indeed; and though we generally, I must say, bear all our hardships remarkably well, yet just at this time it comes upon us with unbearable severity."

"Does it indeed, Mrs. Compton? . . . . But you have never yet turned your head to look at my bees; . . . . for my part, I can sit and watch them by the hour together, if my book is not too interesting: . . . . careful little fel-

lows! It is but just three o'clock," (standing up as she spoke to look out upon a sun-dial that glittered in the middle of the grass-plat,) "but just past three, and they are beginning to come home with their work already."

Mrs. Compton felt what the French call *desoutée*, but she recovered herself, and returned to the charge.

"You are a happy woman, sister Betsy," said she, "with nothing to care about but your books and your bees!"

"I am *very* happy indeed!" replied the maiden, in an accent that well befitted the words; "and so are my bees too, for it is beautiful weather, and one can almost see the flowers grow, they come on so finely."

"But I want to talk to you, sister Betsy, about our troubles. . . . You don't know how I slave and fag to make our poor girls look like somebody. . . . No Saturday night ever comes that I do not sit up till past midnight striving to make their things decent for Sunday!"

"Do you indeed, Mrs. Compton? . . . . I was

told that they wore pink bows in their bonnets last Sunday, and green the Sunday before; .... but I did not know that you sat up to change them."

"Change them! .... God bless you! .... I wish that was all I have got to do.... Why, I had to wash those pink ribbons, and then dip them in saucer pink, and then rub them very nearly dry, till my poor arms almost came off, and then iron them, and then sew in the wire ribbon again, and then make them up. ... I'll leave you to judge how much sleep I was likely to get; for I could not have the bonnets till after the girls came home from the evening parade, where they had been with Mrs. Colonel Williamson — they never go to parade without one of the regimental ladies as a chaperon."

"But why don't the young ladies rub their ribbons a little themselves?" asked Miss Betsy.

"Oh! that would not answer at all, sister Betsy. Why, that very Saturday night they were at a musical party at Colonel Williamson's, and Sophy was the principal lady singer.

She and that elegant young Willoughby always sing together, and the best judges in Silverton say it is as fine as anything in London."

"Well, that 's very nice indeed, Mrs. Compton, ... and I don't suppose she *could* well rub her ribbons while she was singing."

As she said this, Miss Betsy's eye returned, as if drawn by some strong attraction (as had been often the case before since the conversation began) to the volume that lay open on the little table before her. Mrs. Compton became desperate, and rising from her stool, approached the table, and boldly closed the book.

"Upon my word, you must hear what I have got to say, sister Betsy, and leave alone reading for a minute or so, while I talk to you of what concerns the honour of your family."

"The honour of the family?" . . . . said the spinster in an accent of some alarm, employing herself, however, in finding her place again, and then putting a mark in it. "I hope you have got nothing very bad to tell me about the young ladies, Mrs. Compton?"

"Nothing in the world but good, sister Betsy, if you will but lend us a helping hand, once and away. . . . You seem to know all the news, and therefore I dare say you have heard that the first battalion of the —— are to go to Plymouth on the seventeenth, and that the second battalion are to march into Silverton on the same day; so the colonels have agreed that a fête, a public breakfast and dancing to the band, in tents, in a field behind the Spread Eagle, shall be given by the officers of the first battalion on the sixteenth, and that all or nearly all the officers of the second battalion shall have leave to come forward one day's march to join it, and be introduced to all the neighbourhood. Now, just fancy our girls being invited to such a party as this, and not having a dress in the world that they can go in. . . . Just tell me what you think of this, sister Betsy?"

"Not having had much experience in such matters, Mrs. Compton, I really am quite at a loss to guess what it is that young ladies are likely to do in such a case."

"Don't you think it would be very natural, sister Betsy, to turn towards some kind, generous, rich relation, and ask their help out of such a strait? . . . . don't you think this would be natural and right, sister Betsy?"

"Yes, very natural and right indeed, Mrs. Compton."

"Thank God! . . . . then all our troubles are at an end! . . . . Dear, blessed, sister Betsy! . . . . ten pounds, ten pounds will be quite enough for us all, and buy a pair of new black stockings for Josiah into the bargain, in case he should like to go."

Miss Betsy made no reply, but drawing the table a little towards her, opened her book, and began to read.

"It 's a long walk I have to go, sister," resumed Mrs. Compton, "and I shall be particularly glad to get home; . . ... so, will you have the kindness to give me the money at once?"

"Ma'am?" . . . . said Miss Betsy, looking up with a most innocent expression of countenance.

"Whatever sum you may be pleased to grant us, sister Betsy, I beg and entreat you to give me directly."

"So I would, Mrs. Compton, without a moment's delay," replied Miss Betsy, with the most cheerful good-humour, "only I don't intend to give you any money at all."

"Oh! isn't that treachery?.... isn't that cruelty?" exclaimed the agitated matron, wringing her hands. "Did not you say, sister Betsy, that it would be the most natural and right thing in the world to ask one's rich relations in such a moment as this?"

"But I never said it would be right to ask me, Mrs. Compton."

"But you meant it, if you did not say it, and that I'm sure you can't deny,.... and isn't it hard-hearted to disappoint me now?"

"It is a great deal more hard-hearted in you, Mrs. Compton, to take upon you to say that I am rich. I am a poor crooked ram's-horn of a body, as you know well enough, and I want the comfort and the consolation of all the little countrified indulgences that my good

father provided for me by his will. You were a beauty, Mrs. Compton, and your daughters are beauties, and it must be a great blessing to be a beauty; but when God denied me this, he gave me a kind-hearted father, who took care that if I could not have lovers, I should have wherewithal to do tolerably well without them; and I am not going to fly in the face of Providence, or of my father either, in order to dress you and your daughters up to please the officers. So now, Mrs. Compton, I think you had better go home again."

"And is this the way you treat your poor brother's children, Miss Betsy? . . . . your own flesh and blood! . . . . and they, poor girls, sitting at home in the midst of their faded, worn-out trumpery, and thinking what a disgrace they shall be to the name of Compton in the eyes of all the country, if their aunt Betsy won't come forward to help them!"

"Stop a minute, Mrs. Compton, and I will help them in the best manner I can. But I must go into my own room first, and you may sit here the while."

"Will you give me a draught of milk; sister Betsy?" said the again sanguine visitor, "my mouth is perfectly parched."

The same little girl who had acted as her usher was again within call, and Miss Betsy summoned her by name.

"Go to your mother, Sally, and desire her to spare me a pennyworth of fresh milk; and here, my dear, is the money to pay for it. Don't drop it, Sally."

"Dear me, sister Betsy, I don't want to put you to the expense of a penny for me; .... I thought that you had milk allowed you in your rent."

"And so I have, as much as I can use. But you are not me, Mrs. Compton; and I make a great point of being just and exact in all ways.... And now I will go for what I promised you."

In about ten minutes the little lady returned with something in her hand that looked like a sealed letter.

"Please to give this to my nieces, Mrs. Compton, with my good wishes for their well

doing and happiness; and now, if you please, I will wish you good morning, for I am rather tired of talking. Don't open that letter, but give it sealed to your daughters. Good morning, Mrs. Compton."

Miss Betsy then carefully took up the empty cup which her visitor had drained, and returned to the house, leaving her sister-in-law to set off upon her homeward walk in a condition painfully balancing between hope and fear; nevertheless she obeyed the command she had received, and delivered the letter unopened into the hands of her daughter Martha.

That young lady tore it asunder by the vehemence of her haste to obtain information as to what it might contain, but Miss Sophia, who was of a more gentle nature, quietly took the dissevered parts, and having carefully placed them side by side upon the table, read as follows:

"Niece Martha and Niece Sophia,

"Your mother tells me that you are greatly troubled in your minds as to what dresses you

shall appear in at a fête, or entertainment, about to be given by some officers. She tells me that your dresses are all very dirty, wherefore I hereby strongly advise you never on any account to put them on again till such time as they shall be made clean; for it is by no means an idle proverb which says, 'Cleanliness is next to godliness.' Your mother spoke also of some articles which, as she said, it would be necessary for you to put on upon this occasion, all of which you possessed, but in a state greatly faded—which means, as I take it, that they have lost their colour by exposure to the sun; observing, (what is indeed very obviously true,) that as this fête or entertainment is to be given by daylight, the loss of colour in these articles would, if seen at such a time, become particularly conspicuous. It is therefore her opinion, and it is in some sort mine also, that the wearing such faded apparel would be exposing yourselves to the unpleasant observations of your richer, cleaner, and smarter neighbours. For which reason my opinion is, (and I shall be very glad if it

prove useful to you,) that you avoid such a disagreeable adventure, by staying at home.

"I am your aunt,

"ELIZABETH COMPTON."

The effect likely to be produced by such a communication as this, upon ladies in the situation of Mrs. Compton and her daughters, must be too easily divined to require any description; but the resolution taken in consequence of it by Miss Martha, being rather more out of the common way, shall be related in a chapter dedicated to the subject.

CHAPTER III.

GRAPHIC DESCRIPTION OF THE MOST INTERESTING OF THE SILVERTON LOCALITIES. — A RENCONTRE NOT UNEXPECTED.—A SUCCESSFUL MANŒUVRE.

After uttering a few of those expressions which, by a very remarkable sort of superstition, most nations of the civilized world hold to be a relief under vexation, Miss Martha Compton resumed the bonnet and parasol which she had but recently laid aside, and without consulting either mother or sister, who were occupied in a reperusal of Miss Betsy's epistle, she sallied forth, and deliberately took her way in a direction leading towards the barracks, which were situated close by the turnpike that marked the entrance to the town.

Let it not be supposed, however, that the young lady had any intention of entering within the boundary of that region, whose very name

is redolent to all provincial female hearts as much of terror as of joy; she had no such desperate measure in her thoughts. Nor was there need she should; for between the curate's dwelling and the barrack-yard there was a three-cornered open space, planted with lime trees, displaying on one side some of the handsomest shops in the town, among which were the pastry-cook's and the circulating library, (both loved resorts of idle men,) and beneath the trees a well-trodden, a *very* well-trodden walk, rarely or never without some lounging red coat to enliven its shade. When it is added, that in this open space the band played morning and evening, all the world will be aware that if not the centre, it was decidedly the heart of Silverton, for to and from it the stream of human life was ever flowing, and all its tenderest affections were nourished there.

Being by necessity obliged to pass along this walk, or the pavement which skirted the road beside it, Miss Martha Compton had no occasion whatever to enter the barrack-yard, or even to approach its enclosure, in order to

ensure meeting, within the space of any given hour before mess-time, any officer she might wish to see.

There was at this particular epoch much of constancy in the feelings of the fair Martha; for though she had parted from Captain Tate only three-quarters of an hour before, it was Captain Tate, and Captain Tate only, that she now wished to see. Nor did she long wish in vain. When her tall person, straight ankles, and flashing eyes first entered upon the "High Street Parade," Captain Tate was swallowing the fourth spoonful of a raspberry ice; but, ere she had reached the middle of it, he was by her side.

"Oh! Captain Tate!" she exclaimed, with heightened colour and brightened eyes, . . . "I did not expect to see you again this morning . . . . I thought for certain you would be riding with the colonel, or the major, or some of them."

"Ah! Miss Martha! . . . . You don't know what it is to be ordered from quarters where . . . . you don't know what it is to be torn

heart and soul and body asunder, as I shall be in a few days, ... or you would not fancy one should be riding out of town, as long as one had the power of staying in it!"

"Oh dear! . . . . you won't mind it, I'm sure . . . you will like Plymouth quite as well . . . . or perhaps better than you do Silverton: . . . . we shall all remember you longer than you will remember us."

"Do not say so! . . . . do not say so! . . . . beautiful Martha!—you cannot think it."

"I'm sure I do," responded the young lady, with a very distinct sigh.

It was exceedingly wrong in Captain Tate (yet all his family and intimate friends declared that he was as worthy a fellow as ever lived)—it was exceedingly wrong in him to offer his arm to Miss Martha the moment he heard this sigh; for in fact he was engaged to be married to his cousin, and the marriage ceremony was only deferred till he should be gazetted as a major; yet he scrupled not, as I have related, to offer his arm, saying in a very soft, and even tender accent,—

" I know it is not the etiquette of dear, quiet little Silverton, for the officers to offer their arms to the young ladies; but just at the last .... at such a moment as this, not even the Lord Mayor of the town himself could think it wrong."

This reasoning seemed quite satisfactory, for Miss Martha's arm was immediately placed within his.

" It is very true, as you say, Captain Tate; the last time does make a difference. But it will be very dull work for you going to Smith's shop with me; .... and I must go there, because mamma has sent me."

" Dull! .... Oh! Miss Martha, do you *really* think that any place can be dull to me where you are?"

" How do I know, Captain Tate? .... How can any girl know how much, or how little."

" Good heaven! .... we are at the shop already!" said the Captain, interrupting her. .... " How such dear moments fly!"

Miss Martha answered not with her lips, but had no scruple to let her fine large eyes

reply with very intelligible meaning, even though at that very moment she had reached the front of the counter, and that Mr. Smith himself stood before her, begging to know her commands. Her arm, too, still confidingly hung upon that of the stylish-looking young officer; and there certainly was both in her attitude and manner something that spoke of an interest and intimacy between them of no common kind.

A few more muttered words were exchanged between them before the draper's necessary question met any attention whatever, yet in general the Miss Comptons were particularly civil to Mr. Smith, and at length, when she turned to answer him, she stopped short before she had well pronounced the words "mull muslin," saying with an air of laughing embarrassment, and withdrawing her arm,—

"Upon my word and honour, you must go, Captain Tate . . . . I can no more buy anything while you stand talking to me than I can fly."

"Did not you promise me?" said the Cap-

tain reproachfully, and not knowing what in the world to do with himself till it was time to dress.

"Yes, I know I did," she replied; "but the truth is," .... and she pressed both her hands upon her heart, and shook her head .... "the thing is impossible .... You must leave me, indeed! .... we shall meet to-night at the Major's, you know .... farewell!" .... and she stretched out her hand to him with a smile full of tender meaning.

The Captain looked rather puzzled, but fervently pressed her hand, and saying "*Au revoir* then!" left the shop. The young lady looked after him for a moment, and then, turning to Mr. Smith with a look, a sigh, and a smile not at all likely to be misunderstood, said,—

"I suppose, Mr. Smith, you have heard the news about me? .... There never was such a place for gossip as Silverton."

Mr. Smith smilingly protested he had heard nothing whatever about her, but added, with very satisfactory significance, that he rather thought he could guess what the news was,

and begged very respectfully to wish her joy of it.

"You are very kind, Mr. Smith; I am sure it is the last thing I expected .... so much above me in every way. . . . And now, Mr. Smith, I want to speak to you about the things that must be bought. I am sure you are too neighbourly and too kind to put difficulties in my way. It is a very different thing now, you know, as to what I buy; and I am sure you will let me have quite on my own account, and nothing at all to do with papa, a few things that I want very much at the present moment."

Miss Martha looked so handsome, and the whole affair seemed so clear and satisfactory, that Mr. Smith, careful tradesman as he was, could not resist her appeal, and declared he should be happy to serve her with whatever articles she might choose to purchase.

Her dark eyes sparkled with the triumph of success; she had often felt her own powers of management swelling within her bosom when she witnessed the helpless despondency of her father, or listened to the profitless grumbling

of her mother, upon every new pecuniary pressure that beset them; and it is not wonderful if she now believed more firmly than ever, that much suffering and embarrassment might very often be spared, or greatly alleviated, by the judicious exercise of such powers as she felt conscious of possessing.

As a proof that her judgment was in some measure commensurate with her skill, she determined not to abuse the present opportunity by contracting a debt which it would be quite impossible for her father to pay; so, notwithstanding all the tempting finery with which the confiding Mr. Smith spread the counter, she restrained her purchases to such articles as it might really have endangered all their schemes of future conquest to have been without, and then took her leave, amidst blushes and smiles, and with many assurances to the gently-facetious shopkeeper, that let her be where she would, she should never forget his obliging civility.

It was a moment of great triumph for Martha when Mr. Smith's man arrived, and the

huge and carefully packed parcel was brought up to the chamber where Mrs. Compton and her daughters sat at work.

"What in the world is this?" exclaimed the mother, seizing upon it. "Is it possible that her letter was only a joke, and that the little fright has actually sent you some dresses at last?"

"It is much more likely, I fancy, that I have coaxed Mr. Smith into giving us a little more credit. It can all be paid off by a little and a little at a time, you know; and at any rate, here are some very pretty dresses for the fête, besides about three pounds' worth of things that we really could not do without any longer."

"And do you really mean, Martha, that you have got Smith to send in all these beautiful things on credit?"

"I do indeed, mamma."

"Was there ever such a girl! . . . . Only look, Sophy, at this lovely muslin! Why, it will wash, and make up again with different trimmings as good as new for a dozen

regiments to come ! . . . . Oh ! you dear clever creature, what a treasure you are ! . . . . I wish to God I had trusted all to you from the first, and not tired myself to death by walking over to that stingy little monster . . . . but, tired or not, we must cut these dear sweet dresses out at once. Nancy Baker must come in and make the bodies, and we must set to, girls, and run the seams . . . . and a pleasure it will be too, God knows ! . . . . I have worked at turning and twisting old gowns into new ones till I have hated the sight of an ironing box and a needle ; but this is another guess sort of a business, and I shall set about it with a right good will, I promise you."

And so she did, and the dresses went on prosperously, as well as everything else connected with the officers' fête ; and when the wished-for, but dreaded day arrived, in which so many farewell sighs were to be sighed, and so many last looks looked, and so many scrutinizing glances given, as to what might be hoped for from the flirtations of the ensuing year, the sun shone so brightly as evi-

dently to take part with the new-comers, permitting not one single cloud to sympathise with those who were about to depart.

Of all the beauties assembled at this hybrid festival, none appeared to greater advantage than the Misses Compton. Their dresses were neither dirty nor faded, but exceedingly well calculated to set off their charms as favourably as their mother herself could have desired. Captain Tate, after dancing his last dance with Martha, pointed her out with some feeling of triumph to one of the new arrivals as the girl upon whom he had bestowed the largest share of his regimental gallantries; but he was far from imagining, as he did so, how very much better she had contrived to manage the flirtation than himself. She had made it the means of clothing herself and sister from top to toe, while to him it had been very costly in gloves, ices, eau de cologne, and dancing-pumps.

CHAPTER IV.

A WEDDING, AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.—A TRANSFER OF PROPERTY.—MISS MARTHA RECEIVES A PROPOSAL OF MARRIAGE.—ANOTHER EXPEDITION TO COMPTON BASETT.

THE regimental gala which had been looked forward to with so much interest, though very gay and very agreeable, did not perhaps produce all the results expected by the soft hearts and bright eyes of Silverton, for only one wedding was achieved in consequence of it. This one made a very hasty and imprudent bride of Sophia Compton. Her charming voice, joined to her pretty person, was too enchanting for the enthusiastic Lieutenant Willoughby to leave behind him; and just as the full moon rose upon the tents of the revellers, he drew her gently into the deep shadow of that appropriated to the sutlers, and there swore a very solemn oath that it was quite impossible he

should continue to exist, if she refused to elope with him that evening.

Upon the whole, Miss Sophia was by no means sorry to hear this, but could not help expressing a modest wish that he would be so obliging as to change the plan of operations, and instead of eloping with her, would just speak to papa, and so be married in a proper way.

For a considerable time, longer indeed than it was possible to remain in the shadow of the sutler's tent, the young gentleman declared this to be impossible ; because, in that case, his own relations must be informed of the affair, and he knew perfectly well that if this happened, effectual measures would be taken to prevent his ever possessing his adorable Sophia at all. These arguments were repeated, and dwelt upon with very convincing energy, for the space of one whole quadrille, during which the tender pair sat ensconced behind a fanciful erection, on the front of which was traced, in letters formed of laurel leaves, the words, "TO THE LADIES." Nor was his pretty lis-

tener insensible to their force, or the probable truth of the "*misery*" they predicted; it was, therefore, all things considered, much to the credit of Miss Sophy that she persevered in her refusal of accepting him on the terms he offered.

Lieutenant Willoughby was by no means a wicked young man, but it was his nature to covet particularly whatever it was least convenient to obtain; and it was, I believe, of him that a youthful anecdote has been recorded which sets this disposition in a striking point of view. Upon occasion of some dainty, but pernicious delicacy, being forbidden, or some frolic tending too strongly to mischief being stopped, he is said to have exclaimed, "It is a very, *very* shocking thing, mamma, that everything that is nice is called wrong, and everything that is nasty is called right." This was said when he was seven years old, but at twenty-two he was very nearly of the same unfortunate opinion, and invariably valued everything in proportion to the conviction he felt that he should be opposed in his pursuit of it.

When, therefore, Miss Sophia persisted in her declaration that she would not run away with him, Lieutenant Willoughby became perfectly desperate in his determination to obtain her; and having a sort of natural instinct which convinced him that no proposal of marriage would be ill-received by Mrs. Compton, he wrung the hand of his Sophy, implored her not to dance with anybody else, and then having sought and found her mother amidst the group of matrons who sat apart admiring their respective daughters, he drew her aside, and told his tale of love.

This, as he expected, was by no means unkindly received; and when Mrs. Compton, having recovered from her first ecstasy, began to hint at income and settlement, the impassioned young gentleman contrived to puzzle her so completely, by stating the certainty of his being disinherited if his marriage were immediately known, and the handsome fortune it was possible he might have if it were kept profoundly secret, that he sent her home as vehemently determined to let him marry her daughter,

without saying a word to his family about the matter, as he could possibly have desired.

The result of this may be easily divined. Nothing approved by Mrs. Compton was ever effectually opposed by Mr. Compton; so Miss Sophia was married to Lieutenant Willoughby within ten days of the regimental ball, and within one year afterwards a female infant, called Agnes Willoughby, was placed in the care of the Curate of Silverton and his wife; her young mother being dead, and her broken-spirited father about to set off for the West Indies, having found his father implacable, his well-married sisters indignant, and nothing left him whereon to found a hope of escape from his difficulties except thus giving up his little girl to her grandfather, and exchanging his commission in the gay —— regiment for one in a corps about to embark for a service very likely to settle all his embarrassments by consigning him to an early tomb.

Meanwhile the Curate of Silverton was becoming every day more involved in debt; and his dashing eldest daughter, though handsomer

than ever, painfully conscious that among all the successive legions of lovers whose conspicuous adorations had made her the most envied of her sex, there was not one who offered any rational probability of becoming her husband.

The first of these misfortunes was the most embarrassing, and so imperiously demanded a remedy, that the poor Curate at length consented to find it in the sale of his moiety of his paternal acres. It is certain that his nightly potations of hot toddy had very considerably impaired his powers of caring for anything; nevertheless, it was not without a pang that he permitted his wife to insert an advertisement in the county paper, proclaiming the sale by auction of certain crofts and meadows, barns and byres, making part and parcel of a capital dairy-farm, known by the name of Compton Basett.

When the day of sale arrived, several competitors appeared who bid pretty briskly for the lot; for the land, particularly thirty acres of it, known by the name of "the butcher's

close," was some of the best in the county; but the successful candidate, who, it was pretty evident from the first, was determined that it should be knocked down to no one else, was farmer Wright, Miss Betsy's prosperous and well-deserving tenant. This, though the purchase was a large one for a mere farmer, (amounting to six thousand five hundred and twenty-five pounds,) did not greatly surprise the neighbourhood, for the Wrights were known to be a prudent, thrifty, and industrious race. It is possible they might have been more surprised had they known that it was Miss Betsy herself, and not her tenant, who was the purchaser. But so it was. The twenty-five years which had elapsed since the death of her father had enabled this careful little lady to accumulate, by means of her rent, her five hundred pounds and its compound interest, and the profits of her well-managed apiary, a much larger sum than it required to become the possessor of her brother's share of Compton Basett; and when she had finished the affair, and leased out the whole property (the butcher's

close included) to her friend and tenant farmer Wright, for the annual rent of six hundred pounds (now including two chickens per week for her own use), she still remained possessed of four thousand pounds sterling, safely lodged in the funds; a property which went on very rapidly increasing, as her scale of expense never varied, and rarely exceeded ten pounds per annum beyond the profits of her bees, and her stipulated accommodation from the farm. But, in spite of this strict economy, Miss Betsy was no bad neighbour to the poor, and in a small and very quiet way did more towards keeping dirt and cold out of their dwellings, than many who spent three times as much upon them, and made ten times as much fuss about it.

It was not, however, till many years later, that the fact of her being the possessor of the whole of the Compton Basett estate, became known to any one but farmer Wright; and as to the amount of her half-yearly increasing property in the funds, she had no confidant but her broker. This mystery, this profound secrecy, in the

silent rolling up of her wealth, was perhaps the principal source of her enjoyment from it. It amused her infinitely to observe, that while the bad management and improvidence of her brother and his wife were the theme of eternal gossipings, her own thrift seemed permitted to go quietly on, without eliciting any observation at all. Her judicious and regularly administered little charities, assisted in producing this desired effect, much more than she had the least idea of; for the praises of Miss Betsy's goodness and kindness proceeded from many who had profited more from her judgment, and her well-timed friendly loans, than from her donations; and the gratitude for such services was much more freely and generally expressed, than if the favours conferred had been merely those of ordinary alms-giving. It was therefore very generally reported in Silverton that Miss Betsy Compton gave away all her income in charity, which was the reason why she never did anything to help her embarrassed relations. These erroneous reports were productive of at least one advantage to

the family of the Curate of Silverton, for it effectually prevented their having any expectations from her beyond a vague and uncertain hope, that if she did not bequeath her farm-house and acres to a hospital, the property might be left to them. But not even the croaking ill-will of Mrs. Compton could now anticipate a very early date for this possible bequest; for, pale and delicate-looking as she ever continued, nobody had ever heard of Miss Betsy's having a doctor's bill to pay; and as she was just seven years younger than her brother the Curate, who, moreover, was thought to be dropsical, there appeared wofully little chance that her death would ever benefit her disappointed sister-in-law at all. A very considerable portion of the purchase-money of the estate had dwindled away .... the little Agnes Willoughby had attained the age of eleven years, and Mr. Compton had become so ill as to have been forced to resign his curacy, when Mr. Barnaby, the celebrated surgeon and apothecary of Silverton, who for the last ten years had admired Miss Martha Compton more than any lady he

had ever looked upon, suddenly took courage, and asked her point-blank to become his wife.

Had he done this some few years before, his fate would have been told in the brief monosyllable NO, uttered probably with as much indignation as any sound compounded of two letters could express; but since that time the fair Martha had seen so many colonels, majors, captains, ... ay, and lieutenants too, march into the town, and then march out again, without whispering anything more profitable in her ear than an assurance of her being an angel, that the case was greatly altered; and after the meditation of a moment, she answered very modestly, ... "You must speak to my mother, Mr. Barnaby."

Perfectly satisfied by the reply, Mr. Barnaby did speak to her mother; but the young lady took care to speak to her first, and after a long and very confidential conversation, it was determined between them that the offer of the gentleman should be accepted, that fifty pounds out of the few remaining hundreds should be spent upon her wedding-garments, and that

whenever it pleased God to take poor Mr. Compton, his widow and little grand-daughter should be received into Mr. Barnaby's family.

It has not been recorded with any degree of certainty, whether these last arrangements were mentioned to the enamoured Galen, when the important interview which decided the fate of Miss Martha took place; but whether they were or not, the marriage ceremony followed with as little delay as possible.

Two circumstances occurred previous to the ceremony which must be mentioned, as being calculated to open the character of my heroine to the reader. No sooner was this important affair decided upon, than Miss Martha told her mamma, that it was her intention to walk over to Compton Basett, and inform Miss Betsy of the news herself.

"And what do you expect to get by that, Martha?" said the old lady. "I have not forgot yet *my* walk to Compton Basett just before poor dear Sophy's marriage, nor the trick the little monster played me, making me bring home her vile hypocritical letter as care-

fully as if it had been a bank-note for a hundred pounds. . . . You must go without me, if go you will, for I have taken my last walk to Compton Basett, I promise you."

"I don't want you to trouble yourself about it in any way, mother," replied Miss Martha. "I 'll make Agnes walk with me; and whether I get anything out of the little porcupine or not, the walk can do us no great harm."

"'Tis not so hot as when I went, that 's certain," said Mrs. Compton, becoming better reconciled to the expedition. "She has never seen Agnes since the poor little thing was thought to be dying in the measles, just five years ago; and then, you know, she did hire a nurse, and send in oranges and jellies, and all that sort of trumpery; . . . . and who can say but her heart may soften towards her again, when she sees what a sweet pretty creature she is grown?"

"I can 't say I have much faith in good looks doing much towards drawing her purse-strings. She has seen poor Sophy and me often enough, and I can't say that we ever

found our beauty did us any good with her, neither is it that upon which I reckon now. But telling her of a wedding is not begging, you know, ... and I don't think it impossible but what such a prudent, business-like wedding as mine, may be more to her taste than poor Sophy's, where there was nothing but a few fine-sounding names to look to . . . . and much good they did her, poor thing!"

"Well, set off, Martha, whenever you like. There is no need to make little Agnes look smart, even if I had the means to do it, for it 's quite as well that she should be reminded of the wants of the poor child by the desolate condition of her old straw-bonnet . . . . When do you think you shall go?"

"This afternoon; I 'm sure of not seeing Barnaby again till tea-time, for he has got to go as far as Pemberton, so we may start as soon as dinner is over."

Miss Martha Compton and her young companion set off accordingly about three o'clock, and pursued their way, chiefly in silence, to Miss Betsy's abode; for Agnes rarely spoke to

her aunt, except when she was spoken to, and Miss Martha was meditating profoundly the whole way upon the probability of obtaining Mr. Barnaby's consent to the re-furnishing his drawing-room. It was the month of April, the air deliciously sweet and mild, and birds singing on every tree; so that although the leaves were not yet fully out, they found Miss Betsy sitting as usual in her bower, and enjoying as keenly the busy hum about her bee-hives, as ever Miss Martha did the bustling animation produced by the murmurings of a dozen red-coats.

Miss Betsy was at this time about fifty years of age, and though the defect in her shape was certainly not lessened by age, she was altogether an exceedingly nice-looking little old lady; and her cap was as neat and becoming, and her complexion very nearly as delicate, as at the time of Mrs. Compton's visit just twelve years before.

She fixed her eyes for a moment upon Martha as she approached the bower, but appeared not to know her; the little girl following close

behind, was for a minute or two invisible; but the instant she caught sight of her, she rose from her seat, and stepping quickly forward, took the child by her hand, drew her in, and placed her on the bench by her side.

Little Agnes, who knew she was come to see her aunt, felt assured by this notice that she was in her presence, and, moreover, that she was a very kind person; so, when the old lady, after examining her features very attentively, said, "You are little Agnes, are you not?" she replied without hesitation or timidity, "Yes, I am; and you are good aunt Betsy, that used to give me the oranges."

"Do you remember that, my child? . . . . 'tis a long while, almost half your little life. Take off your bonnet, Agnes, and let me see your face."

Agnes obeyed, the "desolate" straw-bonnet was laid aside, and Miss Betsy gazed upon one of the fairest and most delicate little faces that the soft beams of an April sun ever fell upon.

The pale recluse kept her keen eyes fixed upon the little girl for many minutes without

pronouncing a word; at length she said, but apparently speaking only to herself,—

"It is just such a face as I wanted her to have .... Her father was a gentleman .... She will never have red cheeks, that is quite certain."

"How d'ye do, aunt Betsy?" . . : . said Miss Martha, in a very clear and distinct voice; probably thinking that she had remained long enough in the background.

"Very well, I thank you," was the reply; "and who are you?"

"Dear me, aunt, you must say that for fun, ... for it is hardly likely you should know Agnes, that was almost a baby the last time you ever saw her, and forget me, that was quite grown up at that same time."

"Oh! .... then you are Miss Martha, the great beauty, are you? You look very old indeed, Miss Martha, considering that you can't be very much past thirty, and that I suppose is the reason I did not know you. How is your poor father, Miss Martha?"

"He 's very bad, aunt Betsy; but I hope the

news I am come to tell you will be a comfort to him, and please you too."

"And what news can that be, Miss Martha?"

"I am going to be married, aunt Betsy, to a person that is extremely well off, and able to set me above all poverty and difficulties for ever; . . . . and the only thing against it is, that papa cannot afford to give me any money at all for my wedding clothes, which is a dreadful disgrace to the name of Compton; and to tell you the truth at once, for I am a frank, honest-hearted girl, that never hides anything, I am come over here on purpose to ask you to give me a few pounds, just to prevent my having to ask my husband for a shift."

"If you have no shift, Miss Martha, while you are wearing such a gay bonnet as that, I think any man must be a great fool for taking you. However, that is his affair, and not mine. I cannot afford to buy your wedding-clothes, Miss Martha; nor do I intend ever to give you any money at all for any purpose whatever, either now, or at any future period; so, if you are wise, as well as frank, you will never ask

me again. If you marry a *gentleman*, and have children who shall behave according to my notions of honour, honesty, and propriety, it is possible that the little I may leave will be divided among them, and any others whom I may think have an equal claim upon me. But I heartily hope you will have none, for I feel certain I should not like them; and I would rather that the poor little trifle I may have left when I die, should go to some one I did like."

Miss Martha's heart swelled with rage, yet, remote as Miss Betsy's contingent benefits were likely to be, they had still influence sufficient to prevent her breaking out into open violence, and she sat silent, though with burning cheeks and a beating heart. The address she had just listened to was certainly not of the most agreeable style and tone, but it may be some apology for Miss Betsy's severity to state, that the scene which had taken place in Mr. Smith's shop rather more than twelve years before, in which a certain Captain Tate took an important, though unconscious, part, was accurately

well-known to the little spinster, Mrs. Wright (the wife of her tenant) having witnessed the whole of it.

When she had finished her speech to Miss Martha, which was spoken in her usual gay tone of voice, Miss Betsy turned again towards Agnes, who was then standing at the entrance of the bower, earnestly watching the bees.

"They are pretty, curious creatures, are they not, Agnes?" said she. "I hope some day or other you will be as active and industrious. Do you love to work, my little girl?"

"I love to play better," replied Agnes.

"Ay . . . . that 's because you are such a young thing. And who are your playfellows, Agnes?"

"I have not got any playfellows but myself," was the reply.

"And where do you play?"

"In grandpapa's garden, behind the house."

"And what do you play at?"

"Oh! so many things. I play at making flower-beds in the summer, and at snow-balls in the winter; and I know a blackbird, and

ever so many robin-redbreasts, and they know me, and I . . . ."

"Do you know how to read, Agnes?"

"A little," . . . . replied the child, blushing deeply.

"Come here, then, and read a page of my book to me."

Poor Agnes obeyed the summons, and submissively placing herself by the side of her aunt, took the book in her hands and began to read. But it was so very lame and imperfect a performance, that Miss Betsy wanted either the cruelty or the patience to let it proceed; and taking the volume away, she said, in a graver tone than was usual with her, "Nobody seems to have given themselves much trouble about teaching you, my little girl; . . . . but I dare say you will read better by and bye. . . . Are you hungry, Agnes? . . . . do you wish for something to eat after your walk?"

Delighted at being thus relieved from exposing her ignorance, the little girl replied gaily—

"I am very hungry indeed, ma'am."

"Then sit here to rest for a few minutes, and I will see what I can get for you;" and so saying, Miss Betsy rose, and walked briskly away towards the house.

"Old brute!" . . . . exclaimed Miss Martha, as soon as she was quite beyond hearing. . . . "There's a hump for you! . . . . Isn't she a beauty, Agnes?"

"A beauty, aunt Martha? . . . . No, I don't think she is a beauty, though I like the look of her face too; . . . . but she certainly is not a beauty, for she is not the least bit like you, and you are a beauty, you know."

"And who told you that, child?"

"Oh! I have heard grandmamma and you talk about it very often. . . . and I heard Mr. Barnaby say, when he came in yesterday, 'How are you, my beauty?' . . . . and besides, I see you are a beauty myself."

"And pray, Agnes," replied her aunt, laughing with great good-humour, "how do you know a beauty when you see one?"

"Why, don't I see every time I walk by

Mr. Gibbs's shop, his beauties in the window, with their rosy cheeks, and their black eyes, and their quantity of fine ringlets? and you are exactly the very image of one of Mr. Gibbs's beauties, aunt Martha."

Miss Martha remembered that there *was* one very pretty face in the window of the village perruquier, and doubted not that the little Agnes's observation had reference to that one; it was therefore with one of her most amiable smiles that she replied,—

"You little goose! . . . . how can I be like a painted wax image?"

But the protestations and exclamations by which the simile might have been proved good, were broken off by the approach of a maid-servant from the house, who said that Miss Betsy was waiting for them.

They found the neat little lady in her pretty sitting-room, with a lily-white cloth spread on a table near the open window, and a home-made loaf, a little bowl of native cream, and a decanter of bright spring-water, with a couple of tumblers near it.

Simple as this repast was, it was well relished by both the nieces, though decidedly served in honour of only one. However, no positive objection being made to Miss Martha's taking her share of it, she spared neither the loaf nor the cream; and remembering her mother's account of her penny repast, felt something like triumph as she ate, to think how much more she had contrived to get out of her churlish relative.

But this was all she got . . . . excepting, indeed, that she felt some consolation for her disappointment in having to tell her mother, on her return, that if she had children, (and of course she should, as everybody else had,) they were to have their share of all the old maid might leave.

"Ugly old hypocrite! . . . . it won't be much, take my word for it," replied Mrs. Compton. . . . "She likes all the beggars in the parish a vast deal better than she does her own flesh and blood. . . . Don't talk any more of her, Martha . . . . I should be glad if I was never to hear her name mentioned again!"

CHAPTER V.

A VISIT FROM THE HEIRESS.—MISS AGNES WILLOUGHBY IS SENT TO SCHOOL.

In about a month after this visit, and less than a week before the day fixed upon for the happiness of Mr. Barnaby, Miss Betsy Compton very unexpectedly made a visit to her brother. She found him a good deal altered, but she found him also with his toddy and pipe, both objects of such hatred and disgust to her anchoritish spirit, that all the kind feelings which might have been awakened by his failing health, were chased by looking upon what caused it.

To see her feeble-minded brother was not, however, the only or the principal object of her visit to Silverton; and she permitted not

many minutes to be wasted in mutual questionings that meant very little, before she let him understand what was.

"I am come to speak to you, brother," she said, "about little Agnes. I should like to know in what manner you intend to educate her?"

"Mrs. Compton manages all that, sister Betsy," replied the invalid; "and, at any rate, I am sure I have no money to teach her anything."

"But it is a sin, brother, to let the child run wild about the garden as you would a magpie. . . . Do you know that she can't read?"

"No, sister Betsy, I know nothing at all about it, I tell you. . . . How can I help it? Am I in a condition to teach anybody to read?"

'There are others more to blame than you are, brother, no doubt; . . . . but let it be who's fault it will, it must not go on so. I suppose you will make no objection to my sending her to school?"

"Oh dear, no! not I; . . . . but you had better ask Mrs. Compton about it."

"Very well. . . . But I have your consent, have I not?"

"Dear me, yes, sister Betsy . . . . Why *do* you tease me so, making me take the pipe out of my mouth every minute?"

Miss Betsy left the little smoke-dried back parlour appropriated to the master of the house, and made her way to the front room up stairs called the drawing-room, which had been reserved, since time out of mind, for the use of the ladies of the family and their visitors. There she found, as she expected, Mrs. Compton and her daughter amidst an ocean of needlework, all having reference, more or less, to the ceremony which was to be performed on the following Thursday.

"So, Mrs. Compton," was her salutation to the old lady, and a nod of the head to the young one. "I have been speaking to my brother," continued Miss Betsy, "concerning the education of little Agnes, and he has given his consent to my putting her to school."

"*His* consent!" .... exclaimed Mrs. Compton; "and, pray, is she not my grandchild too? .... I think I have as good a right to take care of the child as he has."

"*She* has a right," replied the spinster, "to expect from both of you a great deal more care than she has found; and were I you, Mrs. Compton, I would take some trouble to conceal from all my friends and acquaintance the fact that, at eleven years of age, my grandchild was unable to read."

"And that's a fact that I can have no need to hide, Miss Betsy, for it's no fact at all—I've seen Martha teaching her scores of times."

"Then have her in, Mrs. Compton, and let us make the trial. If I have said what is not true, I will beg your pardon."

"Lor, mamma!" said Miss Martha, colouring a little, "what good is there in contradicting aunt Betsy, if she wants to send Agnes to school? I am sure it is the best thing that can be done for her, now I am going to be married.... And Mr. Barnaby asked

me the other day, if you did not mean to send her to school."

"I don't want to keep her from school, God knows, poor little thing, or from anything else that could do her good. . . . Only Miss Betsy speaks so sharp. . . . But I can assure you, sister, we should have put her to the best of schools long and long ago, only that, Heaven knows, we had not the means to do it; and thankful shall I be if you are come at last to think that there may be as much charity in helping your own blood relations, as in giving away your substance to strangers and beggars."

"You are right, Mrs. Compton, as far as relates to sending Agnes to school . . . . that will certainly be a charity. When can the child be got ready?"

"As soon as ever you shall be pleased to give us the means, sister Betsy."

"Do you mean, Mrs. Compton, that she has not got clothes to go in?"

"I do indeed, sister Betsy."

"Let me see what she *has* got, and then I shall know what she wants."

"That is easily told, aunt, without your troubling yourself to look over a few ragged frocks and the like. She wants just everything, aunt Betsy," said the bride expectant, brave in anticipated independence, and rather inclined to plague the old lady by drawing as largely as might be on her reluctant funds, now they were opened, even though the profit would not be her own.

"If she really does want everything, Martha Compton, while you are dressed as you now are, very cruel injustice has been done her," replied the aunt. "Your sister had no portion given her, either of the patrimony of her father, or the thousand pounds brought by her mother; and as her marriage with a man who had not a sixpence was permitted, this child of hers has an equal right with yourself to share in the property of your parents."

"The property of their parents! . . . . Why bless me, Betsy Compton, how you do talk! . . . as if you did not know that all the property they ever had, is as good as gone. Has not farmer Wright got the estate? And has not

the butcher, and the baker, and the shoemaker, and all the rest of them, got what it sold for, as well as my thousand pounds among them, long ago?"

"Then you are now on the very verge of ruin, Mrs. Compton?" said the spinster gravely.

"Yes, sister Betsy, we are," replied the matron reproachfully. "And I can't but say," she continued, "that a lone woman like you, without any expenses whatever but your own meat and drink, which everybody says is next to nothing,—I can't but say that you might have helped us a little before now, and no harm done."

"That is your opinion of the case, Mrs. Compton: mine is wholly different. I think harm is done whenever power of any kind is exerted in vain. I have no power to help you. .... Were all I have, poured out upon you, while I lodged myself in the parish workhouse, my conviction is, that I should only be enabling you to commit more follies, and, in my judgment, more sins."

"Well, well, Miss Betsy, it is of no use talk-

ing to you—I know that of old; and to tell you the truth, when I *do* come to beggary, I had rather beg of anybody else than of you. I hear far and near of your charity to others, but I can't say that I ever saw any great symptom of it myself."

"Let me see what clothes little Agnes has got, Mrs. Compton, if you please. Our time will be more profitably employed in seeing what I may be able to do for her, than in discoursing of what I am not able to do for you. Miss Martha then, I suppose, may be able to bring her things in."

"Why, as far as the quantity goes, they won't be very difficult to carry. But I don't see much use in overhauling all the poor child's trumpery .... unless it is just to make you laugh at our poverty, ma'am."

The spinster answered this with a look which shewed plainly enough that, however little beauty her pale face could boast, it was by no means deficient in expression. Miss Martha hastened out of the room to do her errand without saying another word.

I will not give the catalogue of poor Agnes's wardrobe, but only observe that it was considerably worse than Miss Betsy expected; she made, however, no observation upon it; but having examined it apparently with very little attention, she took leave of the mother and daughter, saying she would call again in a day or two, and took with her (no permission asked) a greatly faded, but recently fitted frock, which abduction mother and daughter remonstrated against, loudly declaring it was her best dress, except the old white muslin worked with coloured worsteds, and that she would have nothing upon earth to wear.

"It shall not be kept long," was the reply; and the little lady departed, enduring for a moment the atmosphere of her brother's parlour as she passed, in order to tell him, as she thought herself in duty bound to do, that she should get some decent clothes made for the child, and call again as soon as they were ready to take her to school.

The poor gentleman seemed greatly pleased at this, and said, "Thank you, Betsy," with

more animation than he had been heard to impart to any words for many years.

* * * * * *

It was just three days after Miss Martha Compton had become Mrs. Barnaby, that the same post-chaise drove up to the door that had carried her away from it on an excursion of eight-and-forty hours to Exeter, which the gallant bridegroom had stolen a holiday to give her; but upon this occasion it was hired neither by bride nor bridegroom, but by the little crooked spinster, who was come, according to her promise, to take Agnes to school.

Mrs. Compton was just setting out to pay her first morning visit to the bride, and therefore submitted to the hasty departure of the little girl with less grumbling than she might have done, if less agreeably engaged.

"You must bid your grandpapa good-b'ye, Agnes," said Miss Betsy, as they passed the door of his parlour, and accordingly they all entered together.

"God bless you, my poor little girl!" said

the old man after kissing her forehead, "and keep your aunt Betsy's favour if you can, ... for I don't think I can do much more to help anybody. . . . God bless you, Agnes!"

"Dear me, Mr. Compton! . . . . you need not bring tears in the child's eyes by speaking that way. . . . I am sure she has never wanted friends since her poor dear mother died; and there 's no like she should either, with such an aunt as Martha, married to such a man as Mr. Barnaby. . . . I suppose she is not to be kept from her family, sister Betsy, but that we shall see her in the holidays. I am sure I don't know where she is likely to see things so elegant as at her aunt Barnaby's. . . . Such a drawing-room! . . . . and a man in livery, at least a boy, ... and everything else conformable. . . . I suppose this is to be her home, Miss Betsy, still?"

"I am glad you have mentioned this, Mrs. Compton," replied her sister-in-law, "because now, in the presence of my brother, I may explain my intentions at once. Whatever you may think of my little means, either you or

your wife, or your daughter, brother Josiah, I am not rich enough in my own opinion to make it prudent for me to saddle myself with the permanent charge of this poor child. Moreover, to do so, I must altogether change the quiet manner of life that I have so long enjoyed, and I am not conscious of being bound by any tie sufficiently strong to make this painful sacrifice a duty. Something I think I ought to do for this child, and I am willing to do it. I conceive that it will be more easily in my power to spare something from my little property to obtain a respectable education for her, than either in your's, brother, or even in that of her newly-married aunt Barnaby; for doubtless it would not be agreeable for her to begin her wedded life by throwing a burden upon her husband. But, on the other hand, it will certainly be much more within the power of her aunt Barnaby to give her a comfortable and advantageous home afterwards, than in mine. I will therefore now take charge of her for five years, during which time she shall be supplied with board, lodging, clothes, and

instruction, at my expense; or, in case I should die, at that of my executors. After this period I shall restore her to you, brother, or to her grandmother, if both or either of you shall be alive, or if not, to her aunt Barnaby; and when I die she shall have a share, with such others as I may think have a claim upon me, of the small matter I may leave behind. But this of course must be lessened by the expenses I am now contracting for her."

"And are we never to see her for five years, sister Betsy?" said Mrs. Compton very dolorously.

"To tell you the truth, Mrs. Compton, I think the coming home to you twice a-year, for the holidays, could be no advantage to her education, and the expense of such repeated journeyings would be very inconvenient to me. I have therefore arranged with the persons who are to take charge of her that she is to pass the vacations with them. I shall, however, make a point of seeing her myself more than once in the course of the time, and will undertake that she shall come to Silverton twice

during these five years, for a few days each time. . . . And now, I think, there is no more to say; so come, my little girl, for it is not right to keep the driver and the horses any longer waiting."

The adieux between the parties were now hastily exchanged, little Agnes mounted the post-chaise, aunt Betsy followed, and they drove off, though in what direction they were to go, after leaving the Silverton turnpike, no one had ever thought of inquiring.

Poor Mrs. Compton stood for some moments silently gazing after the post-chaise, and on re-entering her drawing-room, felt a sensation that greatly resembled desolation from the unwonted stillness that reigned there. She was instantly cheered, however, by recollecting the very agreeable visit she was going to pay; and only pausing to put on her new wedding bonnet and shawl, set off for Mr. Barnaby's, saying to the maid, whom she passed as she descended, "I should like, Sally, to have seen what sort of things she has got for the poor child."

"If they was as neat and as nice as the little trunk as was strapped on in the front, and that 's where they was packed, no doubt, ... there wouldn't be no need to complain of them," was the reply. And now, leaving Agnes to aunt Betsy and her fate, I must return to the duty I have assigned myself, and follow the fortunes of Mrs. Barnaby.

CHAPTER VI.

WEDDED HAPPINESS.—DEATH OF MRS. COMPTON.—THE EX-CURATE BROUGHT INTO A PEACEFUL HARBOUR. — HE FALLS SICK, AND HIS SISTER AND GRANDCHILD ARE SUMMONED.

THE first five or six months of Mrs. Barnaby's married life were so happy as not only to make her forget all her former disappointments, but almost to persuade her that it was very nearly as good a thing to marry a middle-aged country apothecary, with a good house and a good income, as a beautiful young officer with neither.

Since her adventure with Mr. Smith, the draper, milliner, mercer, and haberdasher of Silverton *par excellence*, Mrs. Barnaby's genius for making bargains had been sadly damped; not but that she had in some degree saved her

credit with that important and much-provoked personage by condescending to wear the willow before his eyes; she even went so far as to say to him, with a twinkling of lids that passed for having tears in her own,—

"No young lady was ever so used before, I believe. . . . I am sure, Mr. Smith, you saw enough yourself to be certain that I was engaged to Captain Tate, ... yet the moment he found a girl with a little money he sent back all my letters . . . . !"

Perhaps Mr. Smith believed the lady . . . . perhaps he did not; but at any rate he gave her no encouragement to recommence operations upon his confiding nature; on the contrary, he ceased not to send in his little account very constantly once every three months, steadfastly refusing to give credit for any articles, however needful. After the sale of the Compton Basett property the bill was paid, but no farther accommodation in that quarter ever obtained; indeed the facility of selling out of the funds a hundred pounds a time as it was wanted, superseded the necessity of pressing for it, and

in a little way Miss Martha and Mr. Smith had continued to deal most amicably, but always with a certain degree of mutual shyness.

How delightfully different was the case now! .... Mrs. Barnaby had only to send her maid or her man (boy) to the redundant storehouse of Mr. Smith, and all that her heart best loved was sent for her inspection and choice, without the slightest doubt or scruple.

Mr. Barnaby was proud of his wife; for if not quite as slender and delicate, she really looked very nearly as handsome as ever, a slight *soupçon* of rouge refreshing the brilliancy of her eyes, and concealing the incipient fading of her cheeks; while the total absence of *mauvaise honte* (an advantage which may be considered as the natural consequence of a twelve years' reign as the belle of a well-officered county town,) enabled her to preside at his own supper parties, and fill the place of honour as bride at those of his neighbours, with an easy sprightliness of manner that he felt to be truly fascinating. In short, Mr. Barnaby

was excessively fond of his lady, and as he was known to have made much more money than he had spent, as no bill had ever been sent to him without immediate payment following, and as Mrs. Barnaby's nature expanded itself in this enlarged sphere of action, and led her to disburse five times as much as Mr. Barnaby had ever expended without her, all the tradesmen in the town were excessively fond of her too. Wherever she went she was greeted with a smile; and instead of being obliged to stand in every shop, waiting till some one happened to be at leisure to ask her what she wanted to buy, her feathers and her frills were no sooner discovered to be approaching the counter, than as many right arms as were in presence thrust forward a seat towards her, while the well-pleased master himself invariably started forth to receive her commands.

Any bride might have found matter for rejoicing in such a change, but few could have felt it so keenly as Mrs. Barnaby. She was by nature both proud and ambitious, and her per-

sonal vanity, though sufficiently strong within her to form rather a conspicuous feature in her character, was, in truth, only a sort of petted imp, that acted as an agent to assist in forwarding the hopes and wishes which her pride and ambition formed.

This pride and ambition, however, were very essentially different from the qualities known by these names among minds of a loftier nature. The ambition, for instance, instead of being "that last infirmity of noble mind" for which Milton seems to plead so feelingly, was, in truth, the first vice of a very mean one. Mrs. Barnaby burned with ambition to find herself in a situation that might authorize her giving herself the airs of a great lady; and her pride would have found all the gratification it sought, could she have been sure that her house and her dress would be daily cited among her acquaintance as more costly than their own.

Mrs. Barnaby had moreover *un esprit intriguant* in the most comprehensive sense of the phrase, for she would far rather have obtained any object she aimed at by means of her own

manœuvring, than by any simple concurrence of circumstances whatever; and this was perhaps the reason why, at the first moment the proposals of Mr. Barnaby, whom she had (comparatively speaking) used no tricks to captivate, produced a less pleasurable effect upon her mind, than a similar overture from any one of the innumerable military men whom she had so strenuously laboured to win, would have done. However, she was for this very reason happier than many other brides, for, in fact, she became daily more sensible of the substantial advantages she had obtained; and, on the whole, daily better pleased with her complaisant husband.

As her temper, though quietly and steadily selfish, was neither sour nor violent, this state of connubial happiness might have continued long, had not some untoward accidents occurred to disturb it.

The first of these was the sudden and dangerous illness of Mrs. Compton, which was of a nature to render it perfectly impossible for Mr. and Mrs. Barnaby to continue their delightful

little parties at home and abroad. The dying lady ceased not to implore her daughter not to leave her, in accents so piteous, that Mr. Barnaby himself, notwithstanding his tender care for his lady's health, was the first to declare that she must remain with her. This heavy burden, however, did not inconvenience her long, for the seizure terminated in the death of the old lady about a week after its commencement.

But even this, though acknowledged to be "certainly a blessing, and a happy release," could not restore the bride to the triumphant state of existence the illness of her mother had interrupted; for, in the first place, her deep mourning was by no means becoming to her, and she was perfectly aware of it; and her white satin, and her silver fringe, would be sure to turn yellow before she could wear them again. Besides, what was worse than all, a young attorney of Silverton married the daughter of a neighbouring clergyman, who, of course, was immediately installed in all a bride's

honours, to the inexpressible mortification of Mrs. Barnaby.

The annoyance which followed these vexations was, however, far more serious: the resources of poor Mr. Compton were completely exhausted; he had drawn out his last hundred from the funds, and actually remained possessed of no property whatever, except the nearly expired lease, and the worn-out furniture of the house in which he lived.

Mrs. Barnaby listened to the feeble old man's statement of his desperate position with dismay; she knew just enough of his affairs to be aware that it was very likely to be true, though with mistaken tenderness her mother had always refrained from representing their embarrassments to her daughter, as being of the hopeless extent which they really were.

What, then, was to be done? The choice lay between two measures only, both deeply wounding to her pride. In the one case she must leave the old man to be arrested in his bed for the price of the food which for a few months longer perhaps he might still get on

credit . . . . in the other she must undergo the humiliation of informing her husband that all the gay external appearances she and her mother had so laboriously presented to the public eye, were in reality but so much cheatery and delusion; and that, if he would not take compassion on her father's destitute condition, the poor old man must either die in the county prison or the parish workhouse.

The alternative offered more of doubt than of choice, and it might have been long ere she decided, had she not cleverly recollected that, if she decided upon leaving him to get on as he could for a few weeks longer, she must at last submit to her husband's knowing the real state of the case; she therefore resolutely determined that he should know it at once.

The time she chose to make the disclosure was the hour when men are generally supposed to be in the most amiable frame of mind possible, namely, when hunger, but not appetite, has been satisfied, and digestion not fully begun; that is to say, Mr. Barnaby was enjoying his walnuts and his wine.

"My dear Barnaby!" . . . she began, "I have some very disagreeable intelligence to communicate to you, which has reached me only to-day, and which has distressed me more than I can express."

"Good heaven! . . . . What can you mean, my dear love? . . . . For God's sake do not weep, my beautiful Martha, but tell me what it is, and trust to me for consolation."

"And that indeed I must do, dearest Barnaby! . . . . for who else have I now to look to? . . . . My poor father . . . . I had no idea of it till this morning . . . . my poor father is . . . ."

"Dying, perhaps, my poor love! . . . . Alas! Martha dearest, I have long known that his case was perfectly hopeless, and I had hoped that you had been aware of this also; but really, my love, his state of health is such as ought in a great degree to reconcile you to his loss. . . . I am sure he must suffer a great deal at times."

Mrs. Barnaby's first impulse was to reply that what she had to tell was a great deal

worse than that; but this would have been the truth, and a sort of habitual, or it might indeed be called natural cautiousness, led her always to pause before she uttered anything that she had no motive for saying, excepting merely that it was true; and she generally found, upon reconsideration, that there was hardly anything which might not, according to her tactics, be improved by a *leetle* dressing up. So, in reply to this affectionate remonstrance from her husband, Mrs. Barnaby answered with a sob :—

"No, my dear Barnaby! . . . . I have no reason to doubt but that Providence will spare my sole remaining parent for some short time longer, if only to prove to him that his happy daughter has the will as well as the means to supply to him the exemplary wife he has lost! But, alas! dear Barnaby, who in this world can we expect to find perfect? My poor dear mother, in her great anxiety to spare his age and weakness the suffering such intelligence must occasion, most unwisely concealed from him and from me the failure of the merchant

in whose hands he had deposited the sum for which he sold his patrimonial estate. . . . His object in selling it was to increase his income, principally indeed for my poor mother's sake, and now the entire sum is lost to us for ever!"

"God bless me! . . . . This is a sad stroke indeed, my dear! What is the name of this merchant? . . . I hope, at least, that we may get some dividend out of him."

"I really do not know his name, but I know that it is a New York merchant, and so I fear there is little or no chance of our ever recovering a penny."

"Why, really, in that case, I will not flatter you with much hope on the subject. And what has the poor old gentleman got to live upon, my dear Martha?"

"Nothing, Barnaby! . . . absolutely nothing: and unless your tender affection should induce you to permit his spending the little remnant of his days under our roof, I fear a prison will soon enclose him!"

A violent burst of weeping appeared to follow this avowal; and Mr. Barnaby, who was really

a very kind-hearted man, hastened to console her by declaring that he was heartily glad he had a home to offer him. . . . " So, dry up your tears, my dear girl, and let me see you look gay and happy again," said he; " and depend upon it, we shall be able to make papa very comfortable here."

The disagreeable business was over, and therefore Mrs. Barnaby did look gay and happy again. Moreover, she gave her husband a kiss, and said in a very consolatory accent, " The poor old man need not be in our way much, my dear Barnaby; . . . . I have been thinking that the little room behind the laundry may be made very comfortable for him without any expense at all; I shall only just have to . . ."

" No, no, Martha," interrupted the worthy Galen, " there is no need of packing the poor gentleman into that dismal little place. . . . Let him have the room over the dining-room; the south is always the best aspect for the old; and, besides, there is a closet that will serve to keep his pipes and tobacco, and his phials and his pill-boxes, out of sight."

"You are most ex-*cess*-ively kind, my dear Barnaby," replied his lady; "but did not you tell me that you meant to offer the Thompsons a bed when the bachelors' ball is given? . . . . And I am sure you would not like to put *them* anywhere but in the south room."

"I did say so, my dear, and I am sure I meant it at the time; but a bed for the ball-night is of so little consequence to them, and a warm, comfortable room, for your father is so important, that, do you know, it would seem to me quite silly to bring the two into comparison."

"Well! . . . . I am sure I can't thank you enough, and I will go the first thing to-morrow to tell my father of your kindness."

"I must pass by his house to-night, my dear, in my way to the Kellys', and I will just step in and tell him how we have settled it."

It was impossible even for Mrs. Barnaby to find at the moment any plausible reason for objecting to this good-natured proposal; but, in truth, it was far from agreeable to her. Her poor father was quite ignorant of the elegant

turn she had given to the disagreeable fact of his having spent his last shilling, and she was by no means desirous that her kind-hearted husband should enter upon any discussion of his "*misfortunes*" with him. But a moment's reflection sufficed to bring her ready wit into play again; and then she said, in addition to the applause she had already uttered,—"By the by, my dear Barnaby, I am not quite sure that I can let you enjoy this pleasure without my sharing it with you. I know it will make my dear father so *very* happy!"

"Well, then, Martha, put on your bonnet and cloak, and come along; .... it will be better you should go too, or I might linger with him too long to explain matters, and I really have no time to lose."

* * * * * *

The kindness thus manifested by the worthy Barnaby was not evanescent; it led him to see that the money produced by the sale of the little remnant of poor Mr. Compton's property, was immediately disposed of in the payment

of such trifling debts as, despite his long waning credit, he had been able to contract; and for the two years and eight months that he continued struggling with advancing age and increasing disease, his attention to him was unremitting.

During the whole of that time Miss Betsy Compton never saw him. All hope, and indeed all urgent want of assistance from her well-guarded purse having ended, Mrs. Barnaby's anger and hatred towards the spinster, flourished unchecked by any motives of interest; and Miss Betsy was not a person to present herself uninvited at the house of a rich apothecary, who had the privilege of calling her aunt. She had indeed from time to time taken care to inform herself of the condition of her brother, and finding that he wanted for nothing, but was, on the contrary, very carefully nursed and attended, she settled the matter very easily with her conscience; and with the exception of the pension, and other little expenses of Agnes, her income, yearly increasing, continued to roll up for no other purpose, as it should seem, than

merely to afford her the satisfaction of knowing that she was about ten times as rich as anybody (excepting, perhaps, farmer Wright,) believed her to be.

When, however, the last hours of the old man were approaching, he told Mr. Barnaby that he should like to see both his sister and his grandchild; and ten minutes had not passed after he said so, before an express was galloping towards Compton Basett with a civil gentleman-like letter from the apothecary to Miss Betsy, informing her of the condition of her brother, and expressing the hospitable wish that she and the little Agnes would be pleased to make his house their home as long as the poor gentleman remained alive.

Miss Betsy had some strong prejudices, but she had strong discernment too; and few old maids whose personal knowledge of the world had been as contracted as hers, would have so instantly comprehended the good sense and the good feeling of the author of this short note as she did. Her answer was brief, but not so brief as to prevent the friendly feeling with

which she wrote it from being perceptible ; and ere they met, this stranger aunt, and nephew, were exceedingly well-disposed to be civil to each other.

Miss Betsy's arrangements were soon made. She wrote to the person to whose care she had intrusted Agnes, desiring her immediately to send her under proper protection to Silverton ; and having done this, she set off in farmer Wright's chaise-cart to pay her first visit to her married niece, and her last to her dying brother.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ELEGANCE OF MRS. BARNABY DISPLAYED.—ITS EFFECT ON HER AUNT BETSY.—INTERVIEW BETWEEN THE BROTHER AND SISTER.

Agnes Willoughby had never been in Silverton from the day that her aunt Betsy first took her from her grandfather's house. Had Mrs. Compton lived, she would probably have battled for the performance of Miss Betsy's promise, that the little girl should sometimes visit them; but though it is probable Mrs. Barnaby might occasionally have thought of her niece with some degree of interest and curiosity, the feeling was not strong enough to induce her to open a correspondence with Miss Betsy; still it was certainly not without something like pleasure that she found she was again to see her.

Miss Betsy arrived late in the evening of the day on which the summons reached her; and, being shewn into Mrs. Barnaby's smart drawing-room, was received with much stateliness by that lady, who derived considerable consolation, under the disagreeable necessity of welcoming a person she detested, from the opportunity it afforded her of displaying the enormous increase of wealth and importance that had fallen upon her since they last met.

Poor Miss Betsy really felt sad at the thoughts of the errand upon which she was come; nevertheless she could not, without some difficulty, suppress her inclination to smile at the full-blown dignity of Mrs. Barnaby. Fond as this lady was of parading her grandeur on all occasions, she had never, even among the dear friends whom she most especially desired to inspire with envy, felt so strong an inclination to shew off her magnificence as on the present. The covers were removed from the chairs and sofas; the eclipse produced by the dim grey drugget, when stretched across the radiance of the many-coloured carpet, was over; five

golden-leaved annuals, the glory of her library, were spread at well-graduated distances upon her round table; her work-box, bright in its rose-coloured lining, her smart embossed letter-case, her chimney ornaments, her picture frames, her foot-stools, all were uncovered, all were studiously shown forth to meet the careless eye of Miss Betsy; while the proud owner of all these very fine things, notwithstanding the gloomy state of her mansion, was herself a walking museum of lace and trinkets. . . . Nor were her manners less superb than her habiliments.

"I am sorry, Miss Compton," she said . . . . "I may call you Miss Compton now, as my marriage put an end to the possibility of any confusion. . . . I am sorry that your first introduction to my humble abode should have been made under circumstances so melancholy. Dismal as of necessity everything must look now, I can assure you that this unpretending little room is the scene of much domestic comfort."

This was unblushingly said, though the cold, stiff-looking apartment was never entered but

upon solemn occasions, when the whole house was turned inside out for the reception of company. Miss Betsy, or rather Miss Compton, (as, in compliance with Mrs. Barnaby's hint, we will in future call her,) looked round upon the spotless carpet, and upon all the comfortless precision of the apartment, and replied,—

"If this is your common living room, niece Martha, you are certainly much improved in neatness; and seeing it so prim, it is quite needless to ask if you have any children."

This reply was bitter every way; for, first, it spoke plainly enough the spinster's disbelief in the domestic elegance of her niece; and secondly, it alluded to her being childless, a subject of very considerable mortification to Mrs. Barnaby.

How far this sort of ambush warfare might have proceeded it is impossible to say, as it would have been difficult to place together any two people who more cordially disliked each other; but before Mrs. Barnaby had time to seek for words bearing as sharp a sting as those she had received, her husband entered.

He waited not for the pompous introduction his wife was preparing, but walking up to his guest addressed her respectfully but mournfully, saying he feared it was necessary to press an early interview with her brother, if she wished that he should be sensible of her kindness in coming to him.

Miss Compton immediately rose, and uttering a short, strong phrase expressive of gratitude for his kindness to the dying man, said she was ready to attend him. She found her brother quite sensible, but very weak, and evidently approaching his last hour; he thanked her for coming to him, warmly expressed his gratitude to Mr. Barnaby, and then murmured something about wishing to see little Agnes before he died.

"She will be here to-morrow, brother," replied Miss Compton, "and in time, I trust, to receive your blessing."

"Thank you, thank you, sister Betsy; .... but tell me, tell me before you go, ... have you sold father's poor dear fields as I have done? That is all I have got to be very

sorry for . . . . I ought never to have done that, sister Betsy."

Mr. Barnaby had left the room as soon as he had placed Miss Compton in a chair by the sick man's bed, and none but an old woman who acted as his nurse remained in it.

"You may go, nurse, if you please, for a little while; I will watch by my brother," said Miss Compton. The woman obeyed, and they were left alone. The old man followed the nurse with his eyes as she retreated, and when she closed the door said,—

"I am glad we are alone once more, dear sister, for you are the only one I could open my heart to. . . . I don't believe I have been a very wicked man, sister Betsy, though I am afraid I never did much good to anybody, nor to myself neither; but the one thing that lies heavy at my heart, is having sold away my poor father's patrimony. . . . I can't help thinking, Betsy, that I see him every now and then at the bottom of my bed, with his old hat, and his spud, and his brown gaiters . . . . and . . . . I never told anybody; . . . . but he seems al-

ways just going to repeat the last words he ever said to me, which were spoken just like as I am now speaking to you, Betsy, with his last breath; . . . . and he said, 'Josiah, my son, I could not die with a safe conscience if I left my poor weakly Betsy without sufficient to keep her in the same quiet comfort as she has been used to. But it would grieve me, Josiah.' . . . Oh! how plain I hear his voice at this minute!—'it would grieve me, Josiah,' he said, 'if I thought the acres would be parted for ever . . . . they have been above four hundred years belonging to us from father to son; and once Compton Basett was a name that stood for a thousand acres instead of three hundred;' . . . . and then . . . . don't be angry, sister Betsy," said the sick man, pressing her hand which he held, "but he said, 'I don't think Betsy very likely to marry; and if she don't, Josiah, why, then, all that is left of Compton Basett will be joined together again for your descendants,' . . . . and yet, after this I sold my portion, Betsy, ... and I do fear his poor spirit is troubled for it—I do indeed

. . . . and it is that which hangs so heavy upon my mind."

"And if that be all, Josiah, you may close your eyes, and go to join our dear father in peace. He struggled with and conquered his strongest feeling, his just and honourable pride, for my sake; and for his, as well as for the same feeling, which is very strong within my own breast also, I have lived poorly, though not hardly, Josiah, and have added penny to penny till I was able to make Compton Basett as respectable a patrimony as he left it. It was not farmer Wright who bought the land, brother—it was I."

The old man's emotion at hearing this was stronger than any he had shewn for many years. He raised his sister's hand to his lips, and kissed it fervently. "Bless you, Betsy! . . . . bless you, my own dear sister!" . . . . he said in a voice that trembled as much from feeling as from weakness, and for several minutes afterwards he lay perfectly silent and motionless.

Miss Compton watched him with an anx-

ious eye, and not without a flutter at her heart lest she should suddenly find this stillness to be that of death. But it was not so; on the contrary, his voice appeared considerably stronger than it had done since their interview began, when he again spoke, and said,—

"I see him now, sister Betsy, as plainly as I see the two posts at the bottom of my bed, and he stands exactly in the middle between them; he has got no hat on, but his smooth white hair is round his face just as it used to be, and he looks so smiling and so happy. . . . Do not think I am frightened at seeing him, Betsy; quite the contrary. . . . I feel so peaceful . . . . so very peaceful. . . ."

"Then try to sleep, dear brother!" said Miss Compton, who felt that his pulse fluttered, and, aware that his senses were wandering, feared that the energy with which he spoke might hasten the last hour, and so rob his grandchild of his blessing.

"I will sleep," he replied, more composedly, "as soon as you have told me one thing. Who will have the Compton Basett estate, Betsy, when you are dead?"

"Agnes Willoughby," replied the spinster, solemnly.

"That is right. . . . Now go away, Betsy, ... it is quite right . . . . go away now, and let me sleep."

She watched him for a moment, and seeing his eyes close, and hearing a gentle, regular breathing that convinced her he was indeed asleep, she crept noiselessly from his bedside; then having summoned the nurse, and re-established her beside the fire, retired to the solitude of her own room.

CHAPTER VIII.

SOLITARY MEDITATION AND IMPORTANT RESOLUTIONS.—AGNES WILLOUGHBY ARRIVES AT SILVERTON.—HER GRANDFATHER GIVES HER HIS BLESSING, AND DIES.—MISS COMPTON MAKES A SUDDEN RETREAT.

When Miss Compton reached her room, she found a tiny morsel of fire just lighted in a tiny grate; and as the season was November, the hour nine P. M., and the candle she carried in her hand not of the brightest description, the scene was altogether gloomy enough. But not even to save herself from something greatly worse, would she at that moment have exchanged its solitude for the society of Mrs. Barnaby, although she had been sure of finding her in the best-lighted room, and seated beside the brightest fire that ever blazed. So, wrapping around her the stout camlet cloak

by the aid of which she had braved the severity of many years' wintry walks to church, she sat down in the front of the little fire, and gave herself up to the reflections that crowded upon her mind.

Elizabeth Compton did not believe in the doctrine of ghosts; her mind was of a strong and healthy fibre, which was rarely sufficiently wrought upon by passing events to lose its power of clear perception and unimpassioned judgment; but the scene she had just passed through, had considerably shaken her philosophy. Five-and-thirty years had passed since Josiah and Elizabeth shared the paternal roof together. They were then very tender friends, for he was affectionate and sweet-tempered; and she, though nearly seventeen, was as young in appearance, and as much in need of his thoughtful care of her, as if she had been many years younger. But this union was totally and for ever destroyed when Josiah married; from the first hour they met, the two sisters-in-law conceived an aversion for each other which every succeeding interview appeared to strengthen;

and this so effectually separated the brother from the sister, that they had never met again with that peculiar species of sympathy which can only be felt by children of the same parents, till now, that the sister came expressly to see the brother die.

This reunion had softened and had opened both their hearts: Josiah confessed to his dear sister Betsy that his conscience reproached him for having made away with his patrimony .... a fact which he had never hinted to any other human being .... and she owned to him that she was secretly possessed of landed property worth above six hundred a-year, and also—which was a confidence, if possible, more sacred still—that Agnes Willoughby would inherit it.

It would be hardly doing justice to the good sense of Miss Betsy to state, that this rational and proper destination of her property had never been finally decided upon by her till the moment she answered her brother's question on the subject; and still less correctly true would it be to say, that the dying man's delirious fancy respecting the presence of their father

was the reason that she answered that appeal in the manner she did ; yet still there might be some slight mixture of truth in both. Miss Compton was constantly in the habit of telling herself that she had *not* decided to whom she would leave her property ; but it is no less true, that the only person she ever thought of as within the possibility of becoming her heir, was Agnes. It is certain also, as I have stated above, that Miss Compton did *not* believe that departed spirits ever revisited the earth ; nevertheless, the dying declaration of Josiah, that he saw the figure of his father, did produce a spasm at her heart, which found great relief by her pronouncing the words, "Agnes Willoughby."

And now that she was quietly alone, and perfectly restored to her sober senses, she began to reconsider all that she had spoken, and to pass judgment upon herself for the having yielded in some degree to the weakness of a visionary imagination.

The result, however, of this self-examination was not exactly what she herself expected. At first she was disposed to exclaim mentally,

"I have been foolish—I have been weak;" .... but as she gazed abstractedly on her little fire, and thought—thought—thought of all the chain of events (each so little in itself, yet all so linked together as to produce an important whole,) by which she, the sickly, crooked, little Betsy Compton, had become the proprietor of the long preserved patrimony of her ancestors, ... and also, when she remembered the infinite chances which had existed against either of her portionless, uneducated nieces, forming such a marriage as might produce a child of gentle blood to be her successor,—when she thought of all this, and that, notwithstanding the lieutenant's poverty, the name of Willoughby could disgrace none to which it might be joined, she could not but feel that all things had been managed for her better than she could have managed them for herself.

"And if," thought she, "I *was* influenced, by hearing my poor father so accurately described, to bind myself at once by a promise to make little Agnes my heir, how do I know but that Providence intended it should be so?"

"Is my freedom of action then gone for ever?" she continued, carrying on her mental soliloquy. The idea was painful to her, and her head sunk upon her breast as she brooded upon it.

"Not so!" she muttered to herself, after some minutes' cogitation. "I am not pledged to this, nor shall it be so. If indeed some emanation from my father's mind has made itself felt by his children this night, it ought not to make a timid slave of me, but rather rouse my courage and my strength to do something more than mere justice to the race that seems so strangely intrusted to my care. And so I will! . . . . if the girl be such a one as may repay the trouble; . . . . if not, I will shew that I have still some freedom left."

* * * * *

Miss Compton had never seen Agnes Willoughby from the time she first took her from Silverton. Deeply shocked at the profound ignorance in which she found the poor little girl when she visited Compton Basett, she had

set herself very earnestly to discover where she could immediately place her, with the best chance of her recovering the time she had so negligently been permitted to lose, and by good luck heard of a clergyman's family in which young ladies were received for a stipend of fifty pounds a-year, and treated more like the children of affectionate parents than the pupils of mercenary teachers. The good spinster heard all this, and was well pleased by the description; yet would she not trust to it, but breaking through all her habits, she put herself into a post-chaise and drove to the rectory of Empton, a distance of at least twenty miles from the town of Silverton. Here she found everything she wished to find; a small, regular establishment, a lady-like and very intelligent woman, with an accomplished young person, (her only child,) fully capable of undertaking the education of a gentleman's daughter; while the venerable father of the family and of the parish, by his gentle manners and exemplary character, ensured exactly the sort of respect-

ability in the home she sought for the little Agnes, which she considered as its most essential feature.

The preliminaries were speedily arranged, and as soon as a neat and sufficient wardrobe was ready for her use, her final separation from her improvident grandmother took place in the manner that has been related.

When Miss Compton left the little girl in the charge of Mrs. Wilmot, she had certainly no idea of her remaining there above three years without visiting or being seen by any of her family; but Mrs. Wilmot, in her subsequent letters, so strongly urged the advantage of not disturbing studies so late begun, and now proceeding so satisfactorily, that our reasonable aunt Betsy willingly submitted to her remaining quietly where she was; an arrangement rendered the more desirable by the death of her grandmother, and the breaking up of the establishment which had been her only home.

The seeing her again after this long absence was now an event of very momentous importance to Miss Compton. Should she in any way

resemble either her grandmother or her aunt Barnaby, the little spinster felt that the promise so solemnly given would become a sore pain and grief to her, for rather a thousand times would she have bequeathed her carefully collected wealth to the county hospital, than have bestowed it to swell the vulgar ostentation of a Mrs. Barnaby. The power of choice, however, she felt was no longer left her. She had pledged her word, and that under circumstances of no common solemnity, that Agnes Willoughby should be her heir.

The poor little lady, as these anxious ruminations harassed her mind, became positively faint and sick as the idea occurred to her, that the eyes of little Agnes had formerly sparkled with somewhat of the brightness she thought so very hateful in her well-rouged aunt; and at length, having sat till her candle was nearly burnt out, and her fire too, she arose in order to return to the fine drawing-room, and bid her entertainers good night; but she stood with clasped hands for one moment upon the hearthstone before she quitted it, and muttered half

aloud, ... "I have said that Agnes Willoughby shall be my heir, ... and so she shall; . . . . she shall (be she a gorgon or a second Martha) inherit the Compton Basett acres, restored, improved, and worth at least one fourth more than when my poor father . . . . Heaven give his spirit rest! . . . . divided them between his children. But for my snug twelve thousand pounds sterling vested in the three per cents, and my little mortgage of eighteen hundred more for which I so regularly get my five per cent., that at least is my own, and that shall never, *never* go to enrich any one who inherits the red cheeks and bright black eyes of Miss Martha Wisett . . . . No! . . . . not if I am driven to choose an heir for it from the Foundling Hospital!"

Somewhat comforted in spirit by this magnanimous resolve, Miss Compton found her way to the drawing-room, and would have been fully confirmed in the wisdom of it, had any doubt remained, by the style and tone of Mrs. Barnaby, whom she found sitting there in solitary state, her husband being professionally

engaged in the town, and her own anxiety for her dying father quite satisfied by being told that he was asleep.

"And where have you been hiding yourself, aunt Betsy, since you left papa?" said the full-dressed lady, warmed into good humour by the consciousness of her own elegance, and the delightful contrast between a married woman, sitting in her own handsome drawing-room, (looking as she had just ascertained that she herself did look by a long solitary study of her image in the glass,) and a poor crooked little old maid like her visitor. "I have been expecting to see you for this hour past. I hope Barnaby will be in soon, and then we will go to supper. Barnaby always eats a hot supper, and so I eat it with him for company, ... and I hope you feel disposed to join us after your cold drive."

"I never eat any supper at all, Mrs. Barnaby."

"No, really? .... I thought farm-house people always did, though not exactly such a supper as Barnaby's, perhaps, for he always

will have something nice and delicate; and so, as it pleases him, I have taken to the same sort of thing myself . . . . veal cutlets and mashed potatoes, ... or half a chicken grilled perhaps, with now and then a glass of raspberry cream, or a mince pie, as the season may be, all which I take to be very light and wholesome; and indeed Barnaby thinks so too, or else I am sure he would not let me touch it. . . . . You can't think, aunt Betsy, what a fuss he makes about me. . . . To be sure, he is a perfect model of a husband."

"God grant she may be the colour of a tallow-candle, and her eyes as pale and lustreless as those of a dead whiting!" mentally ejaculated the whimsical spinster; but in reply to her niece she said nothing. After sitting, however, for about ten minutes in the most profound silence, she rose and said,—

"I should like to have a bed-candle, if you please, ma'am. I need not wait to see the doctor. If he thinks there is any alteration in my brother, he will be kind enough to let me know."

The lady of the mansion condescendingly rang the bell, which her livery-boy answered with promptness, for he was exceedingly well drilled, Mrs. Barnaby having little else to do than to keep him and her two maids in proper order ; . . . . the desired candle was brought, and Miss Compton having satisfied herself that her brother still slept, retired to rest.

The following day was an important one to her race ; . . . . the last male of the Compton Basett family expired, and the young girl to whom its small but ancient patrimony was to descend, appeared for the first time before Miss Compton in the character of her heiress.

It was about mid-day when the post-chaise which conveyed Agnes arrived at Mr. Barnaby's door. Had the person expected been a judge in whose hands the life and death of the spinster freeholder was placed, her heart could hardly have beat with more anxiety to catch a sight of his countenance, and to read her fate in it, than it now did to discover whether her aspect were that of a vulgar beauty or a gentlewoman.

Miss Compton was sitting in the presence of Mrs. Barnaby when the carriage stopped at the door, and had been for some hours keenly suffering from the disgust which continually increased upon her, at pretty nearly every word her companion uttered. "If she be like this creature," thought she, as she rose from her seat with nervous emotion, "if she be like her in any way. . . . I will keep my promise when I die, but I will never see her more."

Nothing but her dread of encountering this hated resemblance prevented her from going down stairs to meet the important little girl; but, after a moment's fidgetting, and taking a step or two towards the door, she came back and reseated herself. The suspense did not last long; the door was opened, and "Muss Willerby" announced.

A short, round, little creature, who though nearly fourteen, did not look more than twelve, with cheeks as red as roses, and large dark-grey eyes, a great deal brighter than ever her aunt's or grandmother's had been, entered, and timidly stopped short in her approach to her

two aunts, as if purposely to be looked at and examined.

She *was* looked at and examined, and judgment was passed upon her by both; differing very widely, however, as was natural enough, but in which (a circumstance much less natural, considering the qualifications for judging possessed by the two ladies,) the younger shewed considerably more discernment than the elder. Mrs. Barnaby thought her—and she was right—exceedingly like what she remembered her very pretty mother at the same age, just as round and as rosy, but with a strong mixture of the Willoughby countenance, which was very decidedly "Patrician" both in contour and expression.

But poor Miss Compton saw nothing of all this . . . . she saw only that she was short, fat, fresh-coloured, and bright-eyed! . . . . This dreaded spectacle was a death-blow to all her hopes, the hated confirmation of all her fears. It was in vain that when the poor child spoke, her voice proved as sweet as a voice could be,—in vain that her natural curls fell round her

neck as soon as her bonnet was taken off in rich chestnut clusters—in vain that the smile with which she answered Mrs. Barnaby's question, "Do you remember me, Agnes?" displayed teeth as white and as regular as a row of pearls,—all these things were but so many items against her in the opinion of Miss Compton, for did they not altogether constitute a brilliant specimen of vulgar beauty? Had Agnes been tall, pale, and slight made, with precisely the same features, her aunt Betsy would have willingly devoted the whole of her remaining life to her, would have ungrudgingly expended every farthing of her income for her comfort and advantage, and would only have abstained from expending the principal too, because she might leave it to her untouched at her death. But now, now that she saw her, as she fancied, so very nearly approaching in appearance to everything she most disliked, all the long-indulged habits of frugality that had enabled her (as she at this moment delighted to remember) to accumulate a fortune over

which she still had entire control, seemed to rise before her, and press round her very heart, as the only means left of atoning to herself for the promise she had been led to make.

"I will see the eyes of my father's son closed," thought she, "and then I will leave the beauties to manage together as well as they can till mine are closed too, ... and by that time, perhaps, the rents of the lands that I must no longer consider as my own, and my interest and my mortgages, may have grown into something rich enough to make them and theirs wish that they had other claims upon Elizabeth Compton besides being her nearest of kin."

These thoughts passed rapidly, but their impression was deep and lasting. Miss Compton sat in very stern and melancholy silence, such as perhaps did not ill befit the occasion that had brought them all together; but Mrs. Barnaby, whose habitual propensity to make herself comfortable, prevented her from sacrificing either her curiosity or her love of talking to ceremony, ceased not to question Agnes

as to the people she had been with, the manner in which she had lived, and the amount of what she had learned.

On the first subject she received nothing in return but unbounded, unqualified expressions of praise and affection, such as might either be taken for the unmeaning hyperbole of a silly speaker, or the warm out-pouring of well-deserved affection and gratitude, so Miss Compton classed all that Agnes said respecting the family of the Wilmots under the former head: her record of their manner of living produced exactly the same result; and on the important chapter of her improvements, the genuine modesty of the little girl did her great disservice; for when, in answer to Mrs. Barnaby's questions . . . . "Do you understand French? . . . . Can you dance? . . . . Can you play? . . . . Can you draw?" she invariably answered, "A little," Miss Compton failed not to make a mental note upon it, which, if spoken, would have been, "Little enough, I dare say."

This examination had lasted about half an

hour, when Mr. Barnaby entered, and, addressing them all, said, "Poor Mr. Compton has woke up, and appears quite collected, but, from his pulse, I do not think he can last long .... Is this Miss Willoughby, Martha? .... I am sorry that your first visit, my dear, should be so sad a one; .... but you had better all come now, and take leave of him."

The three ladies rose immediately, and without speaking followed Mr. Barnaby to the bedside of the dying man. He was evidently sinking fast, but knew them all, and expressed pleasure at the sight of Agnes. "Dear child!" he said, looking earnestly at her, "I am glad she is come to take my blessing.... God bless you, Agnes! .... She is very like. ... God bless you, Agnes! .... God bless you all!"

Mr. Barnaby took his wife by the arm and led her away; she took her weeping niece with her, but Miss Compton shook her head when invited by Mr. Barnaby to follow them, and in a very few minutes completed the duty to perform which she had left her solitude, for with her own hands she closed her brother's

eyes, and then stole to her room, from which she speedily dispatched an order for a post-chaise to come immediately to the door.

The conduct and manners of Mr. Barnaby had pleased the difficult little lady greatly, and she would willingly have shaken hands with him before leaving his house; but to do this she must have re-entered the drawing-room, and again seen Mrs. Barnaby and Agnes, a penance which she felt quite unequal to perform; so, leaving a civil message for him with the maid, she went down stairs with as little noise as possible as soon as the chaise was announced, and immediately drove off to Compton Basett.

CHAPTER IX.

MR. BARNABY PAYS A VISIT TO COMPTON BASETT, AND RECEIVES FROM THE HEIRESS A FORMAL CONGÉ. — AGNES IS SENT BACK TO SCHOOL, AND REMAINS THERE TILL CALLED HOME BY THE NEWS OF HIS DEATH.

SOME surprise and great indignation were expressed by Mrs. Barnaby on hearing that Miss Compton had departed without the civility of taking leave. She resented greatly the rudeness to herself, but, as she justly said, the meaning of it was much more important to Agnes than to her.

"What is to become of her, Mr. Barnaby, I should like to know?" . . . . said the angry lady. "Agnes says that Mrs. Wilmot expects her back directly, and who is to pay the expense of sending her, I wonder?"

Mr. Barnaby assured her in reply that there would be no difficulty about that, adding, that they should doubtless hear from Miss Compton as soon as she had recovered the painful effect of the scenes at which she had so lately been present.

Days passed away, however, the funeral was over, and everything in the family of Mr. Barnaby restored to its usual routine, yet still they heard nothing of Miss Compton.

"I see clearly how it is," said the shrewd lady of the mansion. "Aunt Betsy means to throw the whole burden of poor dear little Agnes upon us, ... and what in the world are we to do with her, Barnaby?"

"I cannot think she has any such intention, Martha. After the excellent education she has been giving her for the last three or four years, it is hardly likely that she would suddenly give her up, when it is impossible but she must have been delighted with her. But, at any rate, make yourself easy, my dear Martha; if she abandons her, we will not; we have no children of our own, and I think the

best thing we can do is to adopt this dear girl. . . . She is really the sweetest little creature I ever saw in my life. I can assure you, that when her education is finished, I, for one, should be delighted to have her live with us. . . . . What say you to it, Martha?"

"I am sure you are goodness itself, my dear Barnaby; and if the crabbed, crooked old maid would just promise at once to leave her the little she may have left after all her ostentatious charities, I should make no objection whatever to our adopting Agnes. She is just like poor Sophy, and it certainly is a pleasure to look at her."

"Well, then, don't fret yourself any more about aunt Betsy. I will call upon her one of these days when I happen to be going Compton Basett way, and find out, if I can, what she means to do about sending her back to Mrs. Wilmot. It would be a pity not to finish her education, for it is easy to see that she has had great justice done her."

It was not, however, till some word from Agnes gave him to understand that she was

herself very anxious about going on with her studies, and desirous of letting Mrs. Wilmot know what was become of her, that he made or met an opportunity of conversing with Miss Compton. He found her reading a novel in her chimney corner, and dressed in deep, but very homely mourning. She received him civilly, nay, there was even something of kindness in her manner when she reverted to the time she had passed in his house, and thanked him for the hospitality he had shewn her. He soon perceived, however, that the name of Agnes produced no feeling of interest; but that, on the contrary, when he mentioned her, the expression of the old lady's face changed from very pleasing serenity to peevish discomfort; so he wisely determined to make what he had to say a matter of business, and immediately entered upon it accordingly.

"My principal reason, Miss Compton, for troubling you with a visit," said he, "is to learn what are your wishes and intentions respecting Miss Willoughby. Is it your purpose to send her back to Mrs. Wilmot?"

"I have already been at a great and very inconvenient expense, Mr. Barnaby, for the education of Agnes Willoughby; but as I have no intention whatever of straitening my poor little income any further by incurring cost on her account, I am glad that what I *have* done has been of the nature most likely to make her independent of me and of you too, Mr. Barnaby, in future. When I first placed her with Mrs. Wilmot I agreed to keep her there for five years, seventeen months of which are still unexpired. To this engagement I am willing to adhere; and though I can't say I think her a very bright girl, but rather perhaps a little inclining towards the contrary, yet still I imagine that when she knows she has her own bread to get, she may be induced to exert herself sufficiently during the next year and five months to enable her to take the place of governess to very young children, or perhaps that of teacher in a second or third rate school. That 's my notion about her, Mr. Barnaby; and now, if you please, I never wish to hear any more upon the subject."

Greatly displeased by the manner in which Miss Compton spoke of his young favourite, Mr. Barnaby rose, and very drily wished her good morning; adding, however, that no farther delay should take place in sending Miss Willoughby back to resume her studies.

He was then bowing off, but the little lady stopped him, saying, "As I have been the means of sending the child to such a distance from her nearest relation, I mean your wife, sir, it is but just that I should pay such travelling expenses as are consequent upon it. Here, sir, is a ten-pound-note that I have carefully set apart for this purpose; have the kindness to dispense it for her as may seem most convenient. And now, sir, farewell! I wish not again to have my humble retreat disturbed by any persons so much above me in all worldly advantages as you and your elegant wife, and having performed what I thought to be my duty by the little Willoughby, I beg to have nothing farther to do with her. I dare say your lady will grow exceedingly fond of her, for it seems to me that they are vastly

alike, and if that happens; there will be no danger of the young girl's wanting anything that a poor little sickly and deformed old body like me could do for her. Good morning, Mr. Barnaby."

Mr. Barnaby silently received the ten pounds, which he thought he had no right to refuse; and having patiently waited till Miss Compton had concluded her speech, he returned her "good morning," and took his leave.

The worthy apothecary's account of his visit produced considerable sensation. Agnes indeed received it in silence, but the offensive brightness of her eyes was dimmed for a moment or two by a few involuntary tears. Her young heart was disappointed; for not only had the strong liking conceived by the Wilmot family for her aunt Betsy led her to believe that she must unquestionably like her too, but she gratefully remembered her former gentle, quiet kindness to herself; and (worse still), on being brought back amongst her relatives, she had, contrary to what is usual in such cases, con-

ceived the greatest predilection for the only one among them who did not like her at all.

But it was not in silence that Mrs. Barnaby received her husband's statement of the capricious old lady's firmly pronounced resolve of never having anything more to do with Agnes Willoughby. All the old familiar epithets of abuse came forth again as fresh and vigorous as if but newly coined; and though these were mixed up with language which it was by no means agreeable to hear, her judicious husband suffered her to run on without opposition till she was fairly out of breath, and then closed the conversation by putting a bed-candle into her hand, and saying,

"Now let us all go to bed, my dear, ... and I dare say you will have much pleasure in proving to your peevish relative that, as long as you live, Agnes will want no other aunt to take care of her."

The good seed sown with these words brought forth fruit abundantly. Mrs. Barnaby

could not do enough in her own estimation to prove to the whole town of Silverton the contrast between Miss Compton and herself—the difference between a bad aunt and a good one.

Fortunately for the well-being of Agnes at this important period of her existence, she had inspired a strong feeling of affectionate interest in a more rational being than Mrs. Barnaby; her well-judging husband thought they should do better service to the young girl by sending her back to Mrs. Wilmot with as little delay as possible, than by keeping her with them for the purpose of proving to all the world that they were the fondest and most generous uncle and aunt that ever a dependant niece was blest with, and she was sent back to Empton accordingly.

In order to do justice to the kindness of Mr. Barnaby's adoption of the desolate girl, it must be remembered that neither he nor his wife had any knowledge of the scene which passed between Miss Compton and her brother before

his death, neither had they the least idea that the old lady possessed anything beyond her original moiety of the Compton Basett estate; and they both believed her to be so capricious as to render it very probable (although it was remembered she had once talked of leaving it to those who had claims on her) that some of the poor of her parish might eventually become her heirs,—an idea which the unaccountable dislike she appeared to have taken to Agnes greatly tended to confirm.

Once during the time that remained for her continuance with the Wilmots, Agnes paid a fortnight's visit to the abode she was now taught to consider as her home: the next time she entered it, (a few weeks only before the period fixed for the termination of her studies,) she was summoned thither by the very sudden death of her excellent and valuable friend Mr. Barnaby. This event produced an entire and even violent change in her prospects and manner of life, as well as in those of her aunt; and it is from this

epoch that the narrative promised by the title of "The Widow Barnaby" actually commences, the foregoing pages being only a necessary prologue to the appearance of my heroine in that character.

CHAPTER X.

THE WIDOW BARNABY ENTERS ACTIVELY ON HER NEW EXISTENCE.—HER WEALTH.—HER HAPPY PROSPECTS.—MRS. WILMOT VISITS MISS COMPTON, AND OBTAINS LEAVE TO INTRODUCE AGNES WILLOUGHBY.

Mrs. Barnaby was really very sorry for the death of her husband, and wept, with little or no effort, several times during the dismal week that preceded his interment; but she was not a woman to indulge long in so very unprofitable a weakness; and accordingly, as soon as the funeral was over, and the will read, by which he left her sole executrix and sole legatee of all he possessed, she very rationally began to meditate upon her position, and upon the best mode of enjoying the many good things which had fallen to her share.

She certainly felt both proud and happy as

she thought of her independence and her wealth. Of the first she unquestionably had as much as it was possible for woman to possess, for no human being existed who had any right whatever to control her. Of the second, her judgment would have been more correct had she better understood the value of money. Though it is hardly possible any day should pass without adding something to the knowledge of all civilized beings on this subject, it is nevertheless certain that there are two modes of education which lead the mind in after life into very erroneous estimates respecting it. The one is being brought up to spend exactly as much money as you please, and the other having it deeply impressed on your mind that you are to spend none at all. In the first case, it is long before the most complete reverse of fortune can make the *ci-devant* rich man understand how a little money can be eked out, so as to perform the office of a great deal; and in the last, the change from having no money to having some will often, if it come suddenly, so puzzle all foregone

conclusions, as to leave the possessor wonderfully little power to manage it discreetly.

The latter case was pretty nearly that of Mrs. Barnaby: when she learned that her dear lost husband had left her uncontrolled mistress of property to the amount of three hundred and seventy-two pounds per annum, besides the house and furniture, the shop and all it contained, she really felt as if her power in this life were colossal, and that she might roam the world either for conquest or amusement, or sustain in Silverton the style of a retired duchess, as might suit her fancy best.

Never yet had this lady's temper been so amiably placid, or so caressingly kind, as during the first month of her widowhood. She gave Agnes to understand that she wished to be considered as her mother, and trusted that they should find in each other all the happiness and affection which that tenderest of ties was so well calculated to produce.

"It will not be my fault, Agnes," she said, "if such be not the case. Thanks be to heaven, and my dear lost Barnaby, I have wealth

enough to consult both your pleasure and advantage in my future mode of life; and be assured, my dear, that however much my own widowed feelings might lead me to prefer the tranquil consolations of retirement, I shall consider it my duty to live more for you than for myself; and I will indeed hasten, in spite of my feelings, to lay aside these sad weeds, that I may be able, with as little delay as possible, to give you such an introduction to the world as my niece has a right to expect."

Agnes was at a loss what to reply; she had still all the frank straight-forwardness of a child who has been educated by unaffected, sensible people, and yet she knew that she must not on this occasion say quite what she thought, which would probably have been,—

"Pray, don't fancy that I want you to throw aside your widow's weeds for me, aunt. . . . I don't believe you are one half as sorry for uncle Barnaby's death as I am". . . . But fortunately there was no mixture of *bêtise* in her frankness; and though it might have been beyond her power to express any great satis-

faction at being thus addressed, she had no difficulty in saying,—" You are very kind to me, aunt," for this was true.

Notwithstanding this youthful frankness of mind, however, Agnes had by this time lost in a great measure that very childish look which distinguished her at the time her appearance so little pleased the fastidious taste of Miss Compton. She was still indeed in very good health, which was indicated by a colour as fresh, and almost as delicate too, as that of the wild rose; but her rapid growth during the last two years had quite destroyed the offensive " roundness," and her tall, well-made person, gave as hopeful a promise as could be wished for of womanly grace and beauty. The fair face was already the very perfection of loveliness; and had the secretly proud Miss Compton seen her as she walked in her deep heavy mourning beside her wide-spreading aunt to church, on the Sunday when that lady first restored herself to the public eye, she might perchance have thought, that not only was she worthy to inherit Compton Basett and all its accumulated rents, but

any other glory and honour that this little earth of ours could bestow.

* * * * * *

A feeling of strong mutual affection between the parties, led both the Wilmot family and Agnes to petition earnestly that the few weeks which remained of the stipulated (and already paid for) five years, might be completed; and Mrs. Barnaby, though it was really somewhat against her inclination, consented.

But though she had not desired this renewed absence of her niece, the notable widow determined to put it to profit, and set about a final arrangement of all her concerns with an activity that proved good Mr. Barnaby quite right in not having troubled her with any assistant executor.

She soon contrived to learn who it was who wished to succeed her "dear Barnaby," and managed matters so admirably well as to make the eager young man pay for the house, furniture, shop, &c. &c., about half as much again as they were worth, cleverly con-

triving, moreover, to retain possession for three months.

This important business being settled, she set herself earnestly and deliberately to consider what, when these three months should be expired, she should do with her freedom, her money, herself, and her niece. In deciding upon this question, she called none to counsel, for she had sense enough to avow to herself that she should pay not the slightest attention to any opinion but her own. In silence and in solitude, therefore, she pondered upon the future ; and, to assist her speculations, she drew forth from the recesses of an old-fashioned bureau sundry documents and memoranda relative to the property bequeathed to her by her husband.

It was evident that her income would now somewhat exceed four hundred a-year, and this appeared to her amply sufficient to assist the schemes already working in her head for future aggrandizement, but by no means equal to what she felt her beauty and her talents gave her a right to hope for.

"It is, however, a handsome income," thought she, "and such a one as, with my person, may, and must, if properly made use of, lead to all I wish!" . . . .

Mrs. Barnaby had once heard it said by a clever man, that human wishes might oftener be achieved, did mortals better know how to set about obtaining them.

"First," said the oracle, "let him be sure to find out what his wishes really are. This ascertained, let him, in the second place, employ all his acuteness to discover what is required for their fulfilment. Thirdly, let him examine himself and his position, in order to decide how much he, or it, can contribute towards this. Fourthly, let him subtract the sum of the capabilities he possesses from the total of means required. Fifthly, let him learn by, with, and in his heart of hearts, what it is that constitutes the remainder; and sixthly, and lastly, let him gird up the loins of his resolution, and start forth DETERMINED to acquire them. Whoso doeth this, shall *seldom* fail."

In the course of her visitings, military friend-

ships and all included, Mrs. Barnaby, even in the small arena of Silverton, had heard several wise things in her day; but none of them ever produced such lasting effect as the words I have just quoted. They touched some chord within her that vibrated, ... not indeed with such a thrill as they might have made to ring along the nerves of a fine creature new to life, and emulous of all things good and great, but with a little sharp twitch, just at that point of the brain where self-love expands itself into a mesh of ways and means, instinct with will, to catch all it can that may be brought home to glut the craving for enjoyment; and so pregnant did they seem to her of the only wisdom that she wished to master, that her memory seized upon them with extraordinary energy, nor ever after relinquished its hold.

Little, however, could it profit her at the time she heard it; but she kept it, "like an ape in the corner of his jaw, first mouthed, to be last swallowed."

It was upon these words that she now pondered. Her two elbows set on the open bureau,

her legs stretched under it, her lips resting upon the knuckles of her clasped hands, and her eyes fixed in deep abstraction on the row of pigeon-holes before her, she entered upon a sort of self-catechism which ran thus:—

Q. What is it that I most wish for on earth?

A. A rich and fashionable husband.

Q. What is required to obtain this?

A. Beauty, fortune, talents, and a free entrance into good society.

Q. Do I possess any of these? . . . . and which?

A. I possess beauty, fortune, and talents.

Q. What remains wanting?

A. A free entrance into good society.

"TRUE!" she exclaimed aloud, "it is that I want, and it is that I must procure."

Notwithstanding her sanguine estimate of herself, the widow, when she arrived at this point, was fain to confess that she did not exactly know how this necessary addition to her ways and means was to be acquired. Beyond the town of Silverton, and a thinly inhabited

circuit of a mile or two round it, she had not a personal acquaintance in the world. This was a very perplexing consideration for a lady determined upon finding her way into the first circles, but its effect was rather to strengthen than relax her energies.

There was, however, one person, and she truly believed one only in the wide world, who might, at her first setting out upon her progress, be useful to her. This was a sister of Mr. Barnaby's, married to a clothier, whose manufactory was at Frome, but whose residence was happily at Clifton near Bristol. She had never seen this lady, or any of her family, all intercourse between the brother and sister having of late years consisted in letters, not very frequent, and the occasional interchange of presents,—a jar of turtle being now and then forwarded by mail from Bristol, and dainty quarters of Exmoor mutton, and tin pots of clouted cream, returned from Silverton.

Nevertheless Mrs. Peters was her sister-in-law just as much as if they had lived next door to each other for the last five years; and

she had, of course, a right to all the kindness and hospitality so near a connexion demands.

A clothier's wife, to be sure, was not exactly the sort of person she would have chosen, had choice been left her; but it was better than nothing, infinitely better; . . . . "and besides," as the logical widow's head went on to reason, "she may introduce me to people above herself. . . . At a public place, too, like Clifton, it must be so easy! And then every new acquaintance I make will serve to lead on to another. . . . I am not so shy but I can turn all accidents to account; and I am not such a fool as to stand at one end of a room, when I ought to be at the other. . . ."

Mrs. Barnaby never quoted Shakspeare, or she would probably have added here,—

"Why, then the world's mine oyster, which I with *wit* will open," for it was with some such thought that her soliloquy ended.

Day by day the absence of Agnes wore away, and day after day saw some business preparatory to departure dispatched. Sometimes the hours were winged by her having to

pull about all the finery in her possession, and dividing it into portions, some to be abandoned for ever, some to be enveloped with reverend care in cotton and silver paper for her future use, and some to be given to the favoured Agnes.

While such cares occupied her hands, her thoughts naturally enough hurried forward to the time when she should lay aside her weeds. This was a dress so hatefully unbecoming in her estimation, that she firmly believed the inventor of it must have been actuated by some feeling akin to that which instituted the horrible Hindoo rite of which she had heard, whereby living wives were sacrificed to their departed husbands.

"Only!" she cried, bursting out into involuntary thanksgiving, "ours, thank God! is not for ever!"

To appear for the first time in the fashionable world in this frightful disguise, was quite out of the question; and consequently she could not make her purposed visit to Clifton till the

time was arrived for throwing them off, and till . . . . to use her own words, "lilacs and greys were possible". . . . Yet there were other considerations that had weight with her too.

"His sister, however, shall just see me in my widow's weeds," thought she; "it may touch her heart perhaps, and must make her feel how very nearly we are related; . . . . but before any living soul out of the family can come near me, I will take care to look . . . . what I really am! . . . . Six months! . . . . it must, I suppose, be six months first! . . . . Dreadful bore!"

The first half of this probationary term was to be passed at Silverton,—that was already wearing fast away,—and for the latter part of it she determined to take lodgings in Exeter.

"Yes . . . . it shall be Exeter!" she exclaimed, and then added, with a perfect quiver of delight, "Oh! what a difference now from what it was formerly! . . . . How well I remember the time when a journey to Exeter appeared to me the very gayest thing in the world!

. . . . and now I should no more think of staying there than a queen would think of passing her life in her bed-room!"

The more she meditated on the future, indeed, the more enamoured did she become of it, till at length, her affairs being very nearly all brought to a satisfactory conclusion, a restless sort of impatience seized upon her; and nearly a fortnight before the time fixed for the return of Agnes she wrote a very peremptory letter of recall, but altogether omitted to point out either the mode of conveyance, or the protection she deemed necessary for her during the journey.

Perhaps Mrs. Wilmot was not sorry for this, as it afforded her an excuse for remaining herself to the last possible moment with a pupil who had found the way to create almost a maternal interest in her heart, and moreover gave her an opportunity of seeking an interview with the singular but interesting recluse who five years before had placed in her hands the endearing, though ignorant little girl, whose

education had proved a task so unusually pleasing.

The principal reason, however, for Mrs. Wilmot's wishing to pay Miss Compton a visit, arose from the description Agnes had given of her conduct towards her, and of the system of non-intercourse which it was so evidently the little lady's intention to maintain.

Without having uttered a word resembling fault-finding or complaint, Agnes had somehow or other made the Wilmots feel that, though aunt Betsy certainly did not like her, she liked aunt Betsy a great deal better than she did aunt Barnaby; and this, added to the favourable impression Miss Compton had herself left upon their minds, made the good Mrs. Wilmot exceedingly anxious that she should not remain ignorant of the treasure she possessed in her young relation.

The delay of a few days before Mrs. Wilmot could take her pupil home, was inevitable; and when they arrived Mrs. Barnaby had bustled her affairs into such a state of forward-

ness, that, though she received them without any great appearance of melancholy or ill-humour, she hinted pretty plainly that Agnes came too late to be of much use to her in packing.

Mrs. Wilmot made a very sufficient apology for the delay, and then took leave, saying that she should remain in Silverton that night, and drive out the next morning to pay her compliments to Miss Compton. The bare mention of the spinster's name at once converted the widow's civility into rudeness; she offered her guest neither refreshment nor accommodation of any kind; and poor Agnes had the pain of seeing her dearest friend depart to pass the night at an inn, when she would have gladly stood by to watch her slumbers all night, might she have offered her own bed for her use.

On the following morning Mrs. Wilmot paid her purposed visit to Miss Compton, and found her, in dress, occupation, and mode of life, so precisely what she has been described before, that not a word need be added on the subject. Greatly different, however, was the welcome

she accorded that lady to what we have formerly seen her bestow upon her relatives. She greeted her, indeed, with a smile so cordial, and a tone of voice so pleasantly expressive of the satisfaction her visit gave, that it was only when the object of it was brought forward, that Mrs. Wilmot, too, discovered that Miss Compton could be a very cross little old lady when she chose it.

"I shall quite long, my dear madam, to hear your opinion of my pupil," said Mrs. Wilmot, "for I cannot but flatter myself that you will be delighted with her."

"Then ask me nothing about her, ma'am, if you please," replied the recluse.

"But it is near two years, Miss Compton, since you saw her, and she is wonderfully improved in that time," said Mrs. Wilmot. . . . "Yet I own I should have thought that even then, two years ago, when you did see her, that you must have found her a very charming girl, full of sweetness and intelligence, and with a face . . . ."

"We had better say no more about her,

if you please, Mrs. Wilmot," tartly interrupted the recluse. . . . " I dare say you made the best you could of her, and it is no fault of yours that old Wisett's great grand-daughter should be a Wisett ; . . . . but I hate the very sight of her, as I do, and have done, and ever shall do, that of all their kin and kind . . . . so it is no good to talk of it. . . . ."

" The sight of her !" . . . reiterated the astonished Mrs. Wilmot. " Why, my dear Miss Compton, she is reckoned by every one that sees her to be one of the loveliest creatures that nature ever formed. . . . If her timid, artless manners, do not please you, it is unfortunate ; but that you should not think her beautiful, is impossible."

" I beg your pardon, ma'am. . . . . I should not care a straw for the manners of a child, for I know that time and care might change them, ... but it is her person that I can't endure ; . . . . there is no disputing about taste, you know. I should not have thought, indeed, that she was quite the style for you to admire so violently ; . . . . but, of course, that is nothing

to me . . . . I know that the look of her eyes, and the colour of her cheeks, is exactly what I think the most detestable ; . . . there is no right or wrong in the matter . . . . it is all fancy, and the sight of her makes me sick. . . . Pray, ma'am, say no more about her."

There was but one way in which Mrs. Wilmot could comprehend this extraordinary antipathy to what was so little calculated to inspire it, and this was by supposing that Miss Compton's personal deformity rendered the sight of beauty painful to her ; an interpretation, indeed, as far as possible from the truth, for the little spinster was peculiarly sensible to beauty of form and expression wherever she found it ; but it was the only explanation that suggested itself; and with mingled feelings of pity and contempt, Mrs. Wilmot replied, — "There may be no right or wrong, Miss Compton, in a judgment passed on external appearance only, for it may, as you observe, be purely a matter of taste ; but surely it must be otherwise of an aversion conceived against a near relative whose amiable disposition, faultless con-

duct, and brilliant talents, justly entitle her to the love, esteem, and admiration of the whole world. . . . This is not merely a matter of taste, and in this there may be much wrong."

Miss Compton appeared struck by these words, but after pondering a moment upon them, replied, — "And how can I tell, Mrs. Wilmot, but that your judgment of this child's character and disposition may be as much distorted by unreasonable partiality, as your opinion of her vulgar-looking person?"

A new light here broke in upon the mind of Mrs. Wilmot; she remembered the remarkable plumpness of the little Agnes before she made that sudden start in her growth which, in the course of two important years, had converted a clumsy-looking child into a tall, slight, elegantly made girl; and with greatly increased earnestness of manner she answered, —

"I only ask you to see her once, Miss Compton. . . . I have no wish whatever that your judgment should be influenced by mine with respect either to the person or the mind

of Agnes Willoughby; but I greatly wish that your own opinion of her should be formed upon what she now is, and not upon what she has been. I am sure you must feel that this is reasonable. . . . Will you then promise me that you will see her?"

"I will,". . . . replied Miss Compton. "The request is reasonable, and I promise to comply with it. Yet it can only be on one condition, Mrs. Wilmot."

"And what is that, Miss Compton?"

"That I may see her without her horrid aunt Barnaby."

Mrs. Wilmot smiled involuntarily, but answered gravely, "Of course, Miss Compton, that must be as you please. . . . Rather than you should fail to see my pretty Agnes, I will remain another day from home on purpose to bring her to you myself. Will you receive us if we come over to you at this hour to-morrow morning?"

"I will,". . . . again replied the recluse; "and whatever may be the result of the interview, I shall hold myself indebted to

the kind feelings which have led you to insist upon it."

"Thank you, thank you!" said Mrs. Wilmot, rising to take her leave. "To-morrow, then, you will see me again, with my young charge."

CHAPTER XI.

AN IMPORTANT CORRESPONDENCE, AND AN IMPORTANT INTERVIEW.

On returning to her solitary quarters at the King's Head, Mrs. Wilmot called for pen, ink, and paper, and wrote the following note to her young pupil.

"My dear Agnes,

"I am just returned from a visit to Compton Basett, where I was very kindly received by your aunt. She wishes to see you before you leave the neighbourhood, and I have promised to take you to her to-morrow morning; I will therefore call at eleven o'clock, when I hope I shall find you ready to accompany me.

With compliments to Mrs. Barnaby, believe me, dear Agnes,

"Affectionately yours,

"MARY WILMOT."

To this epistle she speedily received the following answer.

"MRS. BARNABY presents her compliments to Mrs. Wilmot, and begs to know if there is any reason why she should not join the party to Compton Basett to-morrow morning? If not, she requests Mrs. Wilmot's permission to accompany her in the drive, as the doing so will be a considerable convenience; Mrs. Barnaby wishing to pay her duty to her aunt before she leaves the country."

To return a negative to this request was disagreeable: being absolutely necessary, however, it was done without delay; but it was with burning cheeks and flashing eyes that Mrs. Barnaby read the following civil refusal.

"Mrs. Wilmot regrets extremely that she is under the necessity of declining the company of Mrs. Barnaby to-morrow morning, but Miss Compton expressly desired that Agnes should be brought to her alone."

To this Mrs. Barnaby replied,—

"As Mrs. Wilmot has been pleased to take upon herself the office of go between, she is requested to inform Miss Betsy Compton, that the aunt who has adopted Agnes Willoughby, intends to bestow too much personal care upon her, to permit her paying any visits in which she cannot accompany her."

* * * * *

The vexed and discomfited Mrs. Wilmot returned to Compton Basett with these two notes in her hand instead of the pretty Agnes, and her mortification was very greatly increased by perceiving that the disappointment of the old lady fully equalled her own. This obvious sympathy of feeling led to a more confidential

intercourse than had ever before taken place between the solitary heiress and any other person whatever; so contrary, indeed, was this species of frank communication to her habits, that it was produced rather by the necessity of giving vent to her angry feelings, than for the gratification of confessing any other.

In reply to her first indignant burst of resentment, Mrs. Wilmot said,—

"I lament the consequences of this ill-timed impertinence, for my poor pupil's sake, more than it is easy for me to explain to you, Miss Compton. . . . Do me the justice to believe that I am not in the habit of interfering in the family concerns of my pupils, and then you will be better able to appreciate the motives and feelings which still lead me to urge you not to withdraw your protection and kindness from Agnes Willoughby."

"I do believe that your motives are excellent; and I can believe, too, that if your pupil deserve half you have said of her, the protection and kindness even of such a being as myself might be more beneficial to her than

being left at the mercy of this hateful, vulgar-minded woman. . . . But what would you have me do, Mrs. Wilmot? . . . . You would not ask me to leave my flowers, my bees, my books, and my peaceful home, to keep watch over Mrs. Barnaby, and see that she does not succeed in making this poor girl as detestable as herself? . . . . You would not expect me to do this, would you?"

"No, Miss Compton; no one, I think, would willingly impose such a task upon you as that of watching Mrs. Barnaby. But I see no objection to your watching Agnes."

"And how is the one to be done without the other? It is quite natural that the child of one of Miss Martha Wisett's daughters, should live with the other of them. My relationship to this girl is remote in comparison to hers."

"Miss Compton," replied Mrs. Wilmot, "I fear that my acquaintance with you hardly justifies the pertinacity with which I feel disposed to urge this point; but, indeed, it is of vital importance to one that I very dearly love,

and one whom you would dearly love too, would you permit yourself to know her."

"Do not apologise to me for the interest you take in her," returned the old lady in a tone rather more encouraging. . . . "There is more need, perhaps, that I should apologise for the want of it . . . . and . . . . to say truth," she added after a considerable pause, "I have no objection to explain my motives to you, ... though it has never fallen in my way before to meet any one to whom I wished to do this. My life has been an odd one; . . . . though surrounded by human beings with whom I have lived on the most friendly terms, I have passed my existence, as to anything like companionship, entirely alone. I have never been dull, for I have read incessantly, and altogether I think it likely that I have been happier than most people. But in the bosom of this unrepining solitude it is likely enough that I have nursed opinions into passions, and distastes into hatred. Thus, Mrs. Wilmot, the reasonable opinion that I set out with, for instance, when inheriting my father's long-descended acres, that

it was my duty in all things to sustain as much as in me lay the old claim to gentle blood which attached to my race, (injured, perhaps, in some degree, by this division of its patrimony in my favour,) even this reasonable opinion, Mrs. Wilmot, has by degrees grown, perhaps, into unreasonable strength; for I would rather, madam, press age and ugliness remarkable as my own to my heart, as the acknowledged descendant of that race, than a vulgar, coarse-minded, coarse-looking thing, though she were as buxom as Martha Wisett when my poor silly brother married her."

The latter part of this speech was uttered with great rapidity, and an appearance of considerable excitement; but this quickly subsided, and the little spinster became as pale and composed as usual, while she listened to Mrs. Wilmot's quiet accents in reply.

"There is nothing to surprise me in this, Miss Compton; the feeling is a very natural one. But the more strongly it is expressed, the more strongly must I wonder at your permitting the sole descendant of your ancient

race to be left at the mercy of a Mrs. Barnaby."

Not all the eloquence in the world could have gone so far towards obtaining the object Mrs. Wilmot had in view as this concluding phrase.

"You are right! . . . . excellent woman! . . . . You are right, and I deserve to see my father's acres peopled by a race of Barnaby's. . . . I will save her! . . . ."

But here the poor old lady stopped. A sudden panic seized her, and she sat for several minutes positively trembling at the idea that she might unadvisedly take some step which should involve her in the horrible necessity of being encumbered for the rest of her life with a companion whose looks or manner might remind her of a Martha Wisett, or a Mrs. Barnaby.

"I dare not do it!" she exclaimed at last. "Do not ask it . . . . do not force me; . . . . or, at any rate, contrive to let me see her first, in a shop, or in the street, or any way. . . . I can decide on nothing till I have seen her!"

"I would do anything within my power to arrange this for you," replied Mrs. Wilmot; "but I cannot delay my return beyond to-morrow; nor do I believe that my agency would render this more easy. Why should you not at once call on both your nieces, Miss Compton? There would be no difficulty in this, and it would give you the best possible opportunity of judging both of the appearance and manners of Agnes."

"Both my nieces! . . . . no difficulty! . . . You understand little or nothing of my feelings. . . . But go home, go home, Mrs. Wilmot. Do your own duty, which is a plain one, ... and leave me to find out mine, if I can."

"You will not, then, abandon the idea of seeing this poor girl, Miss Compton?"

"No, I will not," was the reply, pronounced almost solemnly.

"Then, farewell! my dear madam; I can ask no more than this, except, indeed, your forgiveness for having asked thus much so perseveringly."

"I thank you for it, Mrs. Wilmot. . . . I

believe you are a very good woman, and I will endeavour to act, if God will give me grace, as I think you would approve, if you could read all the feelings of my heart. Farewell!"

And so they parted; the active, useful matron to receive the eager welcome of her expecting family, and the solitary recluse to the examination of her own thoughts, which were alternately both sweet and bitter, sometimes cheering her with a vision of domestic happiness and endearment to soothe her declining age, and sometimes making her shudder as she fancied her tranquil existence invaded and destroyed by the presence of one whom she might strive in vain to love.

CHAPTER XII.

CHOOSING A LADY'S-MAID.—A HAPPY MEETING UNHAPPILY BROKEN IN UPON.—MISS COMPTON UTTERS A LONG FAREWELL TO AGNES.

Mrs. Wilmot did not leave Silverton without taking an affectionate leave of Agnes, and when this was over, the poor girl felt herself wholly, and for ever, consigned to the authority and companionship of Mrs. Barnaby. It would be difficult to trace out the cause of the sharp pang which this conviction brought with it; but it was strong enough at that moment to rob the future of all the bright tints through which eyes of sixteen are apt to look at it. She cherished, certainly, a deep feeling of gratitude for the kindness that afforded her a home; but, unhappily, she cherished also a feeling equally strong, that it was less easy

to repay the obligation with affection than with gratitude.

Not a syllable had been said to her by Mrs. Wilmot respecting the interview she was still likely to have with her aunt Compton; for she had promised this secrecy to the nervous and uncertain old lady, who, while trembling with anxious impatience to see this important niece, shrunk before the difficulties she foresaw in finding such an opportunity as she sought, for she still resolutely persevered in her determination not to see Mrs. Barnaby with her; . . . . but yet, when finally she did contrive to come within sight of the poor girl, it was exactly under the circumstances she so earnestly wished to avoid.

* * * * *

Mrs. Barnaby, in her often meditated estimate of revenue and expenses, had arrived at the conclusion that she ought not to travel without a maid, but that the said maid must be hired at the lowest rate of wages possible. The necessity for this addition to her suite did

not arise from any idle wish for personal attendance, to which she had never been much accustomed, but from the conviction that there was something in the sound of "my maid" which might be of advantage to her on many occasions.

The finding out and engaging a girl that might enact the character of lady's-maid showily and cheaply, was the most important thing still left to be done before they quitted Silverton. The first qualification was a tall person, that might set off to advantage such articles of the widow's cast-off finery as might be unnecessary for Agnes; the next, a willingness to accept low wages.

While meditating on the subject, it occurred to Mrs. Barnaby that one of the girls she had seen walking in procession to church with the charity-school, was greatly taller than all the rest, and, in fact, so remarkably long and lanky, that she felt convinced she might, if skilfully dressed up, pass extremely well for a stylish lady's-maid.

Delighted at the idea, she immediately sum-

moned Agnes to walk with her to the schoolhouse, which was situated outside the town, about a mile, on the road leading to Compton Basett. On reaching the building, her knock was answered by the schoolmistress herself, who civilly asked her commands.

"I must come in, Mrs. Sims, before I can tell you," was the reply, and it was quite true; for, as Mrs. Barnaby knew not the name of her intended Abigail, the only mode of entering upon her business, must be by pointing out the girl whose length of limb had attracted her. But no sooner had she passed the threshold than she perceived the long and slender object of her search immediately opposite to her, in the act of taking down a work-basket from the top of a high commode; which manœuvre, as it placed her on tip-toe, and obliged her to stretch out her longitude to the very utmost, displayed her to the eyes of Mrs. Barnaby to the greatest possible advantage, and convinced her very satisfactorily that her judgment had not erred.

"That is the girl I wanted to speak about,"

she said, pointing to the lizard-like figure opposite to her. "What is her name, Mrs. Sims?"

"This one, ma'am, as is fetching my basket?" interrogated Mrs. Sims in her turn.

"Yes, that one .... that tall girl.... What is her name?"

"Betty Jacks, ma'am, is her name."

"Jacks?" repeated Mrs. Barnaby, a little disconcerted; "Jacks!.... that won't do .... I can never call her Jacks; but for that matter, I could give her another name easy enough, to be sure.... And what is she good for?.... what can she do?"

"Not over much of anything, ma'am. She was put late to me. But she can read, and iron a little, and can do plain work well enough when she chooses it."

"When she chooses it!.... and she 'll be sure to choose it, I suppose, when she goes to service. I want a girl to wait upon me, and to sew for me when she has nothing else to do, and I think this one will do for me very well."

"I ask your pardon, ma'am," replied Mrs. Sims, "but if I might make so bold, I would just say that for a notable, tidy, good girl, Sally Wilkins there, that one at the end of the form, is far before Betty Jacks in being likely to suit."

"What! . . . . that little thing? Why, she is a baby, Mrs. Sims."

"She is eleven months older than Betty Jacks, ma'am, and greatly beyond her in every way."

"But I don't like the look of such a little thing. The other would do for what I want much better. Come here, Betty Jacks. Should you like to go out to service with a lady who would take care that you should always be well dressed, and let you travel about with her, and see a great deal of the world?"

"Yes, my lady," replied the young maypole, grinning from ear to ear, and shewing thereby a very fine set of teeth.

"Well, then, Betty Jacks, I think we shall suit each other very well. But I shan't call you Betty though, nor Jacks either . . . . mind

that. You won't care about it, I suppose, if I find out some pretty, genteel-sounding name for you, will you?"

"No, my lady!" responded the delighted girl.

"Very well; .... and I will give you three pounds a year wages, and good clothes enough to make you look a deal better than ever you did before. What do you say to it?"

"I 'll be glad to come, and thankye, too, my lady, if father will let me."

"Who is her father, Mrs. Sims?"

"Joe Jacks the carpenter, ma'am."

"I don't suppose he is likely to make much objection to her getting such a place as mine, is he?"

"That is what I can't pretend to say, ma'am," replied the schoolmistress very gravely.... "I don't think Betty over steady myself, but of course it is no business of mine, and it will be far best that you should see Joe Jacks yourself, ma'am, and hear what he says about it."

"To be sure; .... and where can I see him?"

"He 'll be certain to be here to-morrow morning, ma'am, for he 'll come to be paid for the bench he made for me; and if so be you would take the trouble to call again just about one, when Betty will be going home with him for the half holiday they always haves of a Saturday, why then, ma'am, you'd be quite sure to see him, and hear what he'd got to say."

"Very well, then, that will do, and we shall certainly walk over again to-morrow, if the weather is anything like fine.—Good morning to you, Mrs. Sims! . . . . Mind what I have said to you, Betty; this is a fine chance for you, and so you must tell your father. Come along, Agnes."

It so chanced that within half an hour of their departure Miss Compton also paid a visit to the school. Mrs. Sims was one of the persons whom she had saved from severe, and probably lasting penury, by one of those judicious loans, which, never being made without good and sufficient knowledge of the party accommodated, were sure to be repaid, and enabled

her to perform a most essential benefit without any pecuniary loss whatever.

There were no excursions which gave the old lady so much pleasure as those which enabled her to contemplate the good effects of this rational species of benevolence, and farmer Wright never failed to offer her a place in his chaise-cart whenever his business took him near any of the numerous cottages where this agreeable spectacle might greet her. On the present occasion he set her down at the door of the school-house, while he called upon a miller at no great distance; and Mrs. Sims, who was somewhat disturbed in mind by the visit and schemes of Mrs. Barnaby, no sooner saw her enter than she led her through the throng of young stitchers and spellers to the tidy little parlour behind.

"Well, now, Miss Compton, you are kindly welcome," she said; "and I wish with all my heart you had been here but a bit ago, for who should we have here, ma'am, but your own niece, Mrs. Barnaby."

Miss Compton knit her brows with an involuntary frown.

"And that sweet, pretty creature, Miss Willoughby, comed with her. . . . She is a beauty, to be sure, if ever there was one."

"What did they come for, Mrs. Sims?" inquired Miss Compton with sudden animation.

"Why, that is just what I want to tell you, ma'am, and to ask your advice about. She come here—Mrs. Barnaby I mean—to look after that saucy Betty Jacks, by way of taking her to be her servant, and travelling about with her; and, upon my word, Miss Compton, she might just as well take my cat there, for any good or use she 's likely to be of: and besides that, ma'am, I have no ways a good opinion of the child, —for child she is, though she 's such a monster in tallness;—she does not speak the truth, Miss Compton, and that 's what I can't abide, and I don't think she 'll do me any credit in any way; . . . . but yet I 'm afraid it would be doing a bad action if I was to stand in the girl's light, and prevent her going, by telling all the ill I think of her, when they comes again to-morrow to settle about it."

Mrs. Sims ceased, and certainly expected a

decided opinion from Miss Compton on the subject, for that lady had kept her eyes fixed upon her, and appeared to be listening with very profound attention; but the only reply was, "And do you think the girl will come with her?"

"Come with who, ma'am?"

"With Mrs. Barnaby, to be sure."

"Oh no, ma'am! she won't come with her. . . . She will go home, as usual, to-night, and is to come back to meet the ladies here, a little after noon to-morrow, with her father."

"But Agnes . . . Miss Willoughby I mean, . . . are you sure she will come back with her aunt to-morrow?"

"I am sure I can't say, ma'am, ... but I think she will; for I well remember Mrs. Barnaby said with her grand way, ... 'We will walk over to-morrow if the weather be anyways fine.'"

Miss Compton now seemed sunk in profound meditation, of which Mrs. Sims fully hoped to reap the fruits; but once more she was dis-

appointed, for when Miss Compton again spoke, it was only to say,—

"I want to see Agnes Willoughby, Mrs. Sims, and I do not want to see Mrs. Barnaby. Do you think you could manage this for me, if I come here again to-morrow?"

"I am sure, ma'am," replied Mrs. Sims, looking a little surprised and a little puzzled—"I am sure there is nothing that I am not in duty bound to do for you, if done it can be; and if you will be pleased to say how the thing shall be managed, I will do my part with a right good will to make everything go as you wish."

This was a very obliging reply, but it shewed Miss Compton that she must trust to her own ingenuity for discovering the ways and means for putting her design in practice. After thinking about it a little, and looking round upon the locale, she said,—

"I will tell you how it must be. I will be here to-morrow before the time you have named to them, and you shall place me in this room. When Mrs. Barnaby is engaged in

talking to the girl and her father, take Agnes by the hand and lead her in to me, saying, if you will, that you have something you wish her to see, ... which will be no more than the truth. If Mrs. Barnaby happens to hear this, and offers to follow, then, as you value my friendship, close the door and lock it, — never mind what she thinks of it . . . . I will take care her anger shall do you no harm."

"Oh dear, ma'am! I 'm not the least afraid of Mrs. Barnaby's anger, ... nor do I expect she will take any notice. She seems so very hot upon having that great awkward hoyden, Betty Jacks, that I don't think, when she is engaged with the father about it, she will be likely to take much heed of Miss Agnes and me. But at any rate, Miss Compton, I 'll take good care, ma'am, that she shan't come a-near you. And now, ma'am, will you be so good as to tell me if you think I shall be doing a sin letting this idle hussy set off travelling with her?"

"No sin at all, Mrs. Sims," replied Miss Compton with decision. "Let the girl be what

she may, depend upon it she is quite . . . ." but here she stopped ; adding a minute after, " Do go, Mrs. Sims, and see if farmer Wright's cart is come back."

A few minutes more brought the humble vehicle to the door, when the heiress climbed to her accustomed place in it, and gave herself up to meditation so unusually earnest, as not only to defeat all the good farmer's respectful attempts at conversation, but to occupy her for one whole hour after her return, and that so completely as to prevent her from opening her half-read volume, though that volume was Walter Scott's.

Thoughts and schemes were working and arranging themselves in her head, which were, in truth, important enough to demand some leisure for their operations. This "*beauty if ever there was one*," this poor motherless and father-forgotten Agnes, this inevitable heiress of the Compton acres, ought she, because she had found her short and fat two years before, to abandon her to the vulgar patronage of the

hateful Mrs. Barnaby? A blush of shame and repentance mantled her pale cheek as this question presented itself, and she acknowledged to her own heart the sin and folly of the prejudice which had led her to turn away from the only being connected with her, to whom she could be useful. She remembered, too, in this hour of self-examination and reproach, that the father of this ill-treated girl was a gentleman; and that she ought, therefore, to have been kindly fostered by the last of the Comptons as a representative more worthy to revive their antiquated claims to patrician rank, than could have been reasonably expected from any descendant of her brother Josiah.

These thoughts having been sufficiently dwelt upon, examined, and acknowledged to be just, the arrangement of her future conduct was next to be considered; and, notwithstanding the singularly secluded life she had led, the little lady was far from being ignorant of the entire change it would be her duty to make in the whole manner of her existence, should she

decide upon taking Agnes Willoughby from Mrs. Barnaby, and becoming herself her sole guardian and protectress.

Could she bear this? . . . . and could she afford it? The little, weak-looking, but wirey frame of the spinster, had a spirit within it of no inconsiderable firmness; and the first of these questions was soon answered by a mentally ejaculated "I WILL," which, in sincerity and intensity of purpose, was well worth the best vow ever breathed before the altar. For the solution of the other, the old lady turned to her account books, and found the leading items in the column of receipts to be as follow:—

	£.
By annual rent from the Compton Basett farm	600
By interest on 12,000*l.* in the Three per Cents	360
By interest on 1800*l.* lent on mortgage at 5*l.* per cent.	90
By interest on 6000*l.* lent on mortgage at 4*l.* per cent.	240
By interest on 2500*l.* lent on mortgage at 5*l.* per cent.	125
	£1415

Of this income, (the last item of which, however, had been entered only three weeks

before, being the result of the latest appropriation of her savings,) Miss Compton spent not one single farthing, nor had done so since the payment in advance of three hundred and fifty pounds to Mrs. Wilmot for the education and dress of Agnes. In fact, the profits arising from the honey she sold, fully furnished all the cash she wanted; as her stipulated supplies from the farm amounted very nearly to all that her ascetic table required. . . . She used neither tea nor wine, milk supplying their place. . . . She had neither rent, taxes, nor servants, to pay; and her toilet, though neat to admiration, cost less than any lady would believe possible, who had not studied the enduring nature of stout and simple habiliments, when worn as Miss Compton wore them.

Such being the facts, it might be imagined that a schedule like the above would have appeared to such a possessor of such an income a sufficient guarantee against any possible pecuniary embarrassment from inviting one young girl to share it with her. But Miss Compton, as she sat in her secluded bower, had for years

been looking out upon the fashionable world through the powerful though somewhat distorting *lunette d'approche* furnished by modern novels; and if she had acquired no other information thereby, she at least had learned to estimate with some tolerable degree of justness the difference between the expense of living in the world, and out of it.

"If I do adopt her, and make her wholly mine," thought she, "it shall not be for the purpose of forming her into a rich country-town miss. . . . She shall be introduced into the world, ... she shall improve whatever talents Nature may have given her by lessons from the best masters; . . . . her dress shall be that of a well-born woman of good fortune, and she shall be waited upon as a gentlewoman ought to be. Can I do all this, and keep her a carriage besides, for fourteen hundred a-year? . . . . No! . . . ." was uttered aloud by the deeply meditative old lady. "What then was she to decide upon? Should she wait for two more years before she declared her intentions, and by aid of the farther sum thus saved enable

herself to reach the point she aimed at?" Something that she took for prudence very nearly answered "YES," but was checked by a burst of contrary feeling that again found vent in words,—"And while I am saving hundreds of pounds, may she not be acquiring thousands of vulgar habits that may again quench all my hopes?. . . No; it shall be done at once." So at length she laid her head on her pillow resolved to take her heiress immediately under her own protection . . . . (provided always that the examination which was to take place on the morrow should not prove that the Wisett style of beauty was unbearably predominant,) and that having arranged with her honest tenant some fair equivalent for her profitable apiary, her lodgings, and her present allowances, she should take her at once to London, devote one year to the completion of her education, and leave it to fate and fortune to decide what manner of life they should afterwards pursue.

For a little rustic old woman who had never in her life travelled beyond the county town of her native shire, this plan was by no means

ill concocted, and must, I think, display very satisfactorily to all unprejudiced eyes the great advantages to be derived from a long and diligent course of novel-reading, as, without it, Miss Compton would, most assuredly, never have discovered that fourteen hundred a-year was insufficient to supply the expenses of herself and her young niece.

But, alas! . . . . All this wisdom was destined to be blighted in the bud.

* * * * *

Miss Compton was true to her appointment, and so was Mrs. Barnaby; the fair Agnes, too, failed not to make her appearance; and moreover the critical eyes of the old lady failed not to discover, at the very first glance, that no trace of Wisett vulgarity was there to lessen the effect of her exceeding loveliness. But all this was of no avail . . . . for the matter went in this wise.

The first who arrived of the parties expected by Mrs. Sims, was Joe Jacks the carpenter. His daughter Betty had given him such an account of the proposal made to her, as caused

him to be exceedingly anxious for its acceptance; and he now came rather before the appointed time, in order to hint pretty plainly to Mrs. Sims that he should take it very ill, if she did not give a good word to help his troublesome Betty off his hands.

Then came Miss Compton, who walked straight through the school-room, and ensconced herself in the little parlour behind it, and in about ten minutes afterwards the stately Mrs. Barnaby and her graceful companion arrived also.

Mrs. Sims was by no means deficient in her manner of managing the little intrigue intrusted to her; she waited very quietly till she perceived Mrs. Barnaby completely occupied in making the carpenter understand, that if she engaged to find shoes, shifts, and flannel petticoats for his daughter, as well as all her finery, the wages could not be more than two pounds. . . . And then she laid a gentle hand on Agnes, who, not being particularly interested in the discussion, suffered herself to be abducted without resistance, and in the next moment found herself in the presence of Miss Compton.

The young girl knew her in a moment, for she had made a deep impression on her memory, both by her kindness at one period, and her capricious want of it at another. But far different was the effect of memory in the old lady; for not only was she unable to recognize in the figure before her the Agnes of her recollection, or rather of her fancy, but it was not immediately that she could be made to believe in the identity.

"You do not mean to tell me, Mrs. Sims, that this young lady is Agnes Willoughby?" said she, rising up, and really trembling from agitation.

"Dear me, yes, Miss Compton, to be sure it is."

"Do you not know me, dear aunt?" said Agnes, approaching her, and timidly holding out her hand.

"Your aunt? . . . . am I really your aunt? . . . . Is it possible that you are my poor brother's grandchild?"

"I am Agnes Willoughby," replied the

young girl, puzzled and almost frightened by the doubts and the agitation she witnessed.

"If you are!" exclaimed Miss Compton, suddenly embracing her, "I am a more guilty creature than I ever thought to be!"

At this moment, and while the arms of the diminutive spinster were still twined round the person of Agnes, who had just decided in her own mind that her great-aunt was the most unintelligible person in the world, the door of the little parlour opened with a jerk that shewed it yielded to no weak hand, and the full-blown person of the widow Barnaby stood before them. Her eyes and her rouge were as bright as ever, and her sober cap and sable draperies vainly, as it should seem, endeavoured to soften those peculiarities of the Wisett aspect against which Miss Compton had sworn eternal hatred, for never had she appeared more detestable; her usual bravura manner indeed was somewhat exaggerated by her indignation at the concealment which had been attempted, and which had been adroitly pointed out to her by the sharp-witted Betty Jacks.

"Soh! . . . . you thought I should not find you out, I suppose!" she exclaimed, as she shut the door behind her.

"God give me patience!" cried the irritated recluse, suddenly disengaging herself from Agnes. "This is strange persecution, Mrs. Barnaby," and as she spoke she endeavoured to effect her retreat. But this could not be done in a straight direction, inasmuch as it required a considerable circuit safely to weather either side of the expansive widow; and before Miss Compton reached the door, that lady had so established herself before it as to render her leaving the room without permission absolutely impossible.

The time had been, when the hope of "getting something out of the little hunch-back," would have enabled Mrs. Barnaby to put a very strong restraint upon any feeling likely to offend her, but this was over. She thought her turn was come now, and considered her own revenues and her own position as so immeasurably superior to those of the little "old woman clothed in grey" who stood shaking

before her, that her pride would never have forgiven her avarice had it led her to neglect this favourable opportunity of displaying some of the contempt and scorn which she had felt she had heretofore received from her.

"Upon my word, Miss Compton," she began, "I do really wonder you are not ashamed of yourself, to come visiting this vulgar body Mrs. Sims, instead of profiting by the notice of your own relations, which might do you honour. And your dress, Miss Compton! . . . What must my niece, Miss Willoughby, think, at seeing the sister of her own grandfather going about in such a horrid, coarse, miserable stuff gown as that? We all know how you have been squandering your little property upon the beggars you get to flatter you, but that is no reason for behaving as you do towards me. My excellent husband has left me in circumstances of such affluence as might enable me to assist you by the gift of some of my own clothes, if you conducted yourself as you ought to do."

This harangue would probably have been

cut short, had Miss Compton retained breath enough to articulate; but astonishment and indignation almost choked her; instead of speaking, she stood still and panted, till Agnes, inexpressibly shocked and terrified, moved a chair towards her, and entreated her to sit down. Her only reply, however, was rudely pushing Agnes and her chair aside, and then, with a sort of desperate effort, exclaiming,—

"Woman! . . . . Let me pass!"

"Oh! yes — you may pass and welcome," said Mrs. Barnaby, standing aside. —"You have behaved to me from first to last more like a fiend than an aunt, and I certainly shall not break my heart if I never set my eyes on you again. Come, Agnes, my love, I have concluded my business in this musty-smelling place, and now let us be gone. . . . Don't stand fawning upon her . . . . I promise you it will be all in vain. . . . You will get nothing by it, my dear."

Distressed beyond measure at this painful scene, and not well knowing how to express the strong feeling which drew her to the side of Miss Compton, Agnes stood timidly uncer-

tain what she ought to do, when Mrs. Barnaby's authoritative voice again uttered, "Come, my dear Agnes, I am impatient to take you away from what I consider so very disgraceful a meeting."

Thus painfully obliged to decide upon either taking leave of her older relative, or of departing without it, Agnes turned again towards Miss Compton, and silently bending down, offered to kiss her cheek. But the angry old lady started away from her, saying,—"None of that, if you please!—No fawning upon me. You are her '*dear love*,' and her '*dear Agnes*,' .... and none such shall ever be graced or disgraced by me!" And thus saying, she walked past the tittering Mrs. Barnaby, and out of the house; preferring the chance of toiling two miles to reach her home, rather than endure another moment passed under the same roof with her.

CHAPTER XIII.

MRS. BARNABY SETS FORTH ON HER TRAVELS.—THE READER TAKES LEAVE OF MISS COMPTON.—MRS. BARNABY ENJOYS HER JOURNEY, AND ARRIVES SAFELY AT EXETER.

WITHIN a week after this unfortunate interview, all Mrs. Barnaby's earthly possessions, excepting her money, were deposited in the waggon that travelled between Silverton and Exeter; and the day afterwards herself, her niece, and her maid, whom she had surnamed Jerningham, (the two former in the coach, and the latter on the top of it,) set forth on their way to that fair and ancient city of the west.

Before we follow them thither, we must stop for a moment to bid a long adieu to poor Miss Compton. Unfortunately for her temper, as well as her limbs, farmer Wright did not overtake her till within a few yards of their home;

and the agitation and fatigue, both equally unusual to her, so completely overpowered her strength and spirits, that having taken to her bed as soon as she reached her room, she remained in it for above a fortnight, being really feverish and unwell, but believing herself very much worse than she really was. During the whole of this time, and indeed for several months afterwards, she never attempted to separate the innocent image of Agnes from the offensive one of Mrs. Barnaby. The caress which the poor girl had offered with such true tenderness and sympathy, was the only distinct idea respecting her that remained on the mind of Miss Compton; and this suggested no feeling but that of indignation, from the conviction that Mrs. Barnaby's "dear love," not a whit less detestable, was only more artful than herself; or that, not yet being in possession of the wealth of which her hateful protectress boasted, she deemed it prudent to aim at obtaining whatever she herself might have to bestow.

Notwithstanding all these disagreeable imaginings, however, the old lady gradually re-

covered both her health and her usual tranquil equality of spirits, sometimes even persuading herself that she was very glad she had not been seduced, by the appearance of Agnes, to sacrifice her own comfort for the advantage of an artful girl, who was, after all, quite as much the grand-daughter of a Wisett as of a Compton.

* * * * *

Never during the prosperous years that Mrs. Barnaby had been the mistress of her comfortable house at Silverton, (excepting, perhaps, for the delightful interval while she was treated throughout the town as a bride,) did she feel half so grand or so happy a personage as now that she had no house at all. There was an elegance and freedom, which she never felt conscious of before, in thus setting off upon her travels with what she believed to be an ample purse, of which she was the uncontrolled mistress, a beautiful niece to chaperone, and a lady's-maid to wait upon her; and had Agnes, who sat opposite to her, been less

earnestly occupied in recalling all the circumstances of her last strange interview with her aunt Compton, she must have observed and been greatly puzzled by the series of (perhaps) involuntary grimaces which accompanied Mrs. Barnaby's mental review of her own situation.

"A rich and handsome widow! . . . . Could fate have possibly placed her in any situation she should have liked so well?" This was the question she silently asked herself, and cordially did her heart answer "No."

As these thoughts worked in her mind her dark, well-marked eyebrows raised themselves, her eyes flashed, and her lips curled into a triumphant smile.

The person who occupied the transverse corner to herself was a handsome young man, who had joined the Silverton coach, from the mansion of a gentleman in the neighbourhood, to which, however, he was himself quite a stranger; and having in vain tried to get sight of the features concealed by the long crape veil beside him, he took to watching those no way concealed by the short crape veil opposite.

"Mother and daughter, of course," thought he. "A young specimen, without rouge or moustache, would not be amiss."

Mrs. Barnaby perceived he was looking at her, and settled her features into dignified but not austere harmony.

"It is very pleasant travelling this morning, ma'am," said the young man.

"As pleasant as a stage-coach can be, I imagine; . . . . but I am so little accustomed to the sort of thing that I am not a very good judge. Do you know, sir, where the coach stops for dinner?"

"I cannot say I do; I never travelled this road before."

"Then you are not a resident in the neighbourhood?"

"No, ma'am, quite a bird of passage. It is the first time I have ever been in Devonshire. It seems to be a beautiful county indeed."

"Very!" . . . . Mrs. Barnaby heartily hoped that no comparisons would follow, as it was not at all her intention to confess, either on the present or any future occasion, that she had never

seen any other; and she therefore rather abruptly changed the conversation by adding, "Do you know, sir, whether there are many outside passengers? . . . . I hope my maid will not be annoyed in any way. . . . It is the first time I ever put her outside a coach!"

"Poor woman!" thought the young man—"lost her husband, and her money with him, I suppose. I must contrive to look at this tall, slender girl, though."

But Agnes seemed little disposed to give him any opportunity of doing so, for she continued to keep her eyes fixed on the scene without, thus very nearly turning her back on her curious neighbour.

Mrs. Barnaby's first act of active chaperonship was a very obliging one; she perceived the young man's object, and not having the slightest inclination to conceal the beauty of Agnes, which she held to be one of the many advantages with which she was herself surrounded, she said,—

"My dear Agnes, do look at that pretty cottage; it is a perfect picture of rural felicity!"

Agnes obeyed the words, and followed with her eyes the finger that pointed through the opposite window, thus indulging her neighbour with a full view of her exquisite profile. The effect was by no means what Mrs. Barnaby expected; the young man looked, and instead of being led by what he saw into talkative civility, he became very respectfully silent. But respectful silence was not an offering to which Mrs. Barnaby in the most brilliant season of her beauty had ever been accustomed; it puzzled her, till a thought struck her which is worth recording, because it very greatly influenced her conduct and feelings for a long time afterwards. This gentleman, whose attentions for the journey she greatly wished to conciliate, had addressed her in the easy style by which "fast" young men are apt to believe they can propitiate the favour of every woman somewhat under fifty years of age, and somewhat, too, beneath themselves in condition. Our traveller had no fear of blundering when he settled that Mrs. Barnaby belonged to this class; but the instant he caught a glimpse of

the countenance of Agnes, he became equally sure that she at least belonged to a higher one. It was not wonderful that poor Miss Compton doubted, when she looked at her, the possibility of her being a descendant of the buxom Martha Wisett, for, excepting something in the form and soft lustre of her dark-brown eyes, her features bore no resemblance to her mother, or her mother's family, but a most decided one to that of her father, who, though a very foolish, hot-headed lieutenant, when we made his acquaintance, was descended from a race of aristocratic ancestors, rather remarkable for their noble and regular cast of features, which appeared indeed to be their least alienable birthright.

The traveller, though a young man, had lived sufficiently in the world to have learned at least the alphabet of character as written on the countenances of those he met, and he spelt gentlewoman so plainly on that of Agnes, that he felt no more right to address her without introduction than he would have done had the stage-coach been an opera-box.

"That 's very odd," . . . . thought Mrs. Barnaby. "She certainly is a most beautiful creature . . . . quite as handsome as I was even in poor dear Tate's days, and yet the moment he got a sight of her, his pleasant, gay manner, changed all at once, and he now looks as glum as a boy at school. . . . Though she is my niece, she is not like me; that 's certain, ... and who knows but that many men may still prefer my style to hers? . . . . As to this one, at least, it is impossible to doubt it, and it will be great folly in me to set out with a fancy that my face and figure, especially when I get back to dress again, will not stand a comparison with hers. For some years, at any rate, in justice to myself, I will keep this in mind; and not take it for granted that every glance directed towards us is for the child, and not for the woman."

This agreeable idea seemed all that was wanting to make the journey perfectly delicious, and not even the continued reserve of the young man could affect in any great degree the charming harmony of her spirits. We hear

much of the beautiful freshness of hope in young hearts just about to make their first trial of the joys of life; but it is quite a mistake to suppose that any such feeling can equal the fearless, confident, triumphant mastery and command of future enjoyment, which dilates the heart, in the case of such an out-coming widow as Mrs. Barnaby.

The Silverton coach set its passengers down at Street's hotel, in the Church-yard; and my heroine, who now for the first time in her life found herself at an inn, with the power of ordering what she chose, determined to enjoy the two-fold gratification of passing for a lady of great fashion and fortune, and of taking especial care of her creature-comforts into the bargain.

"Do you want rooms, ma'am?" said the head of a waiter, suddenly placing itself among the insides.

"Yes, young man, I want the best rooms in the house.... Where is my maid?—Let her be ready to attend me as soon as I ge' out. We have nothing with us but three trunks,

one square box, one hat-box, two carpet-bags, and my dressing-case. Let everything be conveyed to my apartments. Now open the door, and let me get out. . . . Follow me, Agnes. . . . You will come, if you please, without delay, young man, to receive my orders respecting refreshments."

Two lighted candles were snatched up as they passed the bar, and Mrs. Barnaby proceeded up the stairs in state, the waiter and his candles before, Agnes and "*my maid*" behind.

"This room is extremely dark and disagreeable. . . . Pray, send the master of the house to me ; I wish to give my orders to him."

"My master is not at home, ma'am."

"Not at home ? . . . . Extremely negligent, I must say. Perhaps it will be better for me to proceed to some other hotel, where I may be able to see the head of the establishment. I have not been accustomed to be treated with anything like neglect . . . . people of my condition, indeed, seldom are."

"If you will be pleased, my lady, to give

your orders to me," said the waiter very respectfully, "you shall find nothing wanting that belongs to a first-rate house."

"Then, pray, send my maid to me. . . . Oh! there you are, Jerningham."

"Yes, ma'am," answered the gawky soubrette, tucking back the veil with which Mrs. Barnaby had adorned one of her own bonnets, and staring at the draperied windows, and all the other fine things which met her eyes.

"You will see, Jerningham, that my sleeping apartment is endurable."

Now Betty Jacks, though careless and idle, was by no means a stupid girl; but she was but fifteen years old, and her experiences not having hitherto been upon a very extended scale, she found herself at a loss to understand what her new mistress meant, about nine times out of every ten that she spoke to her. On receiving the order above mentioned, she meditated for an instant upon what an "endurable sleeping apartment" might be; but the sagacity which failed to discover this, sufficed to suggest the advantage of not confessing her

ignorance; and she answered boldly, "Yes, sure, ma'am."

"Go, then," said the lady, languidly throwing her person upon a sofa; and then turning to the waiter, who still remained with the door in his hand, she pronounced with impressive emphasis,—

"Let there be tea, sugar, and cream brought, with buttered toast, and muffins also, if it be possible. . . . Agnes, my love, I am afraid there is hardly room for you on the sofa; but sit down, dear, and try to make yourself comfortable on a chair."

The two ladies were now left to themselves, Betty Jacks joyfully accompanying the smart young waiter to the regions below. "And who may be your missus, my dear?" he said, giving her an encouraging chuck under the chin; "she can't have much to do, I 'm thinking, with any of the county families, for they bean't much given to stage-coaches, and never without their own gentlemen to guard 'em. . . . . Is she a real grand lady, or only a strutting make-believe?"

Betty, thinking it much more for her own credit to serve a real grand lady than a make-believe, readily answered.

"To be sure, she is a real grand lady, Mr. Imperdence. . . . We comes up along from Silverton, and she 's one of the finest ladies in the town."

"*In* the town," repeated the knowing waiter significantly. . . . "I understand. . . . Well, she shall have some tea; . . . . And now, my girl, you had better go and do what she bid you."

"Well now, if I hav'n't downright forgot already!" said the unblushing Betty. "Will you tell me what it was then?"

"How old are you, my dear?" was the unsatisfactory reply.

"And pray what 's that to you? . . . . But come now, do tell me, willy', what was it missus told me to do?"

"To go see after her bed, my dear, and all that, and unpack her nightcap, I suppose."

"Well, then, give me a candle,—that 's a good man. . . . But where is her bed, though?"

"You bean't quite hatched yet, my gay

maypole, but you 'll do well enough some of these days. . . . Here, Susan! shew this young waiting-maid a bed-room for two ladies—and one for yourself too, I suppose, my dear. I shouldn't wonder, Susan, if it was possible the grand lady up stairs may pay less than a duchess; but take my word for it she 'll blow you sky high, if you don't serve her as if you thought she was one."

"How did she come?" snappishly inquired the chamber-maid.

"By the Royal Regulator," answered the waiter. "But inside, Susan, inside, you know, and with her lady's-maid here to wait upon her; so mind what you 're about, I tell you."

"Come this way, young woman, if you please," said the experienced official, who was not to be bullied out of a first-floor room by the report of duchess-like airs, or the sight of a lanky child for a waiting-maid. So Betty was made to mount to a proper stage-coach elevation.

Mrs. Barnaby, however, got her tea, and her toast, and her muffins, greatly to her satis-

faction, even though the master of the establishment knew nothing about it; and though she did make Agnes's slender arm pay for the second flight of stairs, in order to prove how very little used she was to such fatigue, she was, on the whole, well pleased with her room when she reached it, well pleased with her bed, well pleased with her breakfast, and ready to set off as soon as it was over to look out for lodgings and adventures.

CHAPTER XIV.

HOW TO CHOOSE LODGINGS.—REASONS FOR LAYING ASIDE WIDOW'S WEEDS.—LADY-LIKE ACCOMPLISHMENTS.—AFFECTIONATE FORETHOUGHT.—CHARMING SENSIBILITY.—GENEROUS INTENTIONS.—A CLEVER LETTER, BUT ONE UPON WHICH DOCTORS MAY DISAGREE.

Of lodgings Mrs. Barnaby saw enough to offer a most satisfactory selection, and heartily to weary Agnes, who followed her up and down innumerable stairs, and stood behind her, during what seemed endless colloquies with a multitude of respectable-looking landladies, long after she had flattered herself that her aunt must have been suited to her heart's desire by what she had already seen. Of adventures the quiet streets of Exeter were not likely to produce many; but the widow had the satisfaction of observing that lounging gentlemen were abun-

dant, a cavalry officer still visible now and then, and that hardly one man in ten of any class passed her without staring her full in the face.

At length, after having walked about till she was sufficiently tired herself, and till poor Agnes looked extremely pale, she entered a pastry-cook's shop for the purpose of eating buns, and of taking into deliberate consideration whether she should secure apartments in the Crescent, which were particularly comfortable, or some she had seen in the High Street, which were particularly gay.

Mrs. Barnaby often spoke aloud to herself while appearing to address her niece, and so she did now.

"That's a monstrous pretty drawing-room, certainly; and if I was sure that I should be able to get any company to come and see me, I'd stick to the Crescent. . . . But it's likely enough that I shall find nobody to know, and in that case it would be most horribly dull. . . . But if we did not get a soul from Monday morning to Saturday night, we could never be

dull in the High Street. Such lots of country gentlemen! . . . And they always look about them more than any other men." And then, suddenly addressing her niece in good earnest, she added,—

"Don't you think so, Agnes?"

"I don't know, ma'am," replied Agnes, in an accent that would have delighted her aunt Compton, and which might have offended some sort of aunts; but it only amused her aunt Barnaby, who laughed heartily, and said, for the benefit of the young woman who presided at the counter, as well as for that of her niece,—

"Yes, my dear, that's quite right; that's the way we all begin. . . . And you will know all, how, and about it, too, long and long before you will own it."

Agnes suddenly thought of Empton parsonage, its pretty lawn, its flowers, its books, and its gentle intellectual inmates, and involuntarily she closed her eyes for a moment and sighed profoundly; but the reverie was not permitted to last long, for Mrs. Barnaby, having finished

her laugh and her bun, rose from her chair, saying,—

"Come along, child! . . . . The High Street will suit us best, won't it, Agnes?"

"You must best know what you best like, aunt," replied the poor girl almost in a whisper, "but the Crescent seemed to me very quiet and agreeable."

"Quiet! . . . . Yes, I should think so! . . . . And if that's your fancy, it is rather lucky that it 's my business to choose, and not yours. And it 's my business to pay too. . . . It 's just sixpence," she added with a laugh, and pulling out her purse. "One bun for the young lady, and five for me. Come along, Agnes . . . . and do throw back that thick crape veil, child. . . . Your bonnet will look as well again!"

* * * * *

Another half hour settled the situation of their lodgings in Exeter. Smart Mrs. Tompkin's first-floor in the High Street, with a bed in the garret for Jerningham, was secured for three months; at the end of which time Mrs.

Barnaby was secretly determined as nearly as possible to lay aside her mourning, and come forth with the apple blossoms, dazzling in freshness, and *couleur de rose*. The bargain for the lodgings, however, was not concluded without some little difficulty, for Mrs. Tompkins, who owned that she considered herself as the most respectable lodging-house keeper in Exeter, did not receive this second and conclusive visit from the elegant widow with as much apparent satisfaction as was expected.

"Here I am again, Mrs. Tompkins!" said the lively lady in crape and bombasin. "I can see no lodgings I like as well as yours, after all."

"Well . . . . I don't know, ma'am, about that," replied the cautious Mrs. Tompkins; "but, to say the truth, I'm not over and above fond of lady lodgers . . . . they give a deal more trouble than gentlemen, and I've always been used to have the officers as long as there were any to be had; and even now, with only three cavalry companies in the barracks, it's a rare chance to find me without them."

"But as you do happen to be without them now, Mrs. Tompkins, and as your bill is up, I suppose your lodgings are to let, and I am willing to take them."

"And may I beg the favour of your name, ma'am?" said the respectable landlady, stiffly.

"Barnaby!" answered the widow, with an emphasis that gave much dignity to the name. "I am the widow of a gentleman of large fortune in the neighbourhood of Silverton, and finding the scene of my lost happiness too oppressive to my spirits, I am come to Exeter with my niece, and only one lady's-maid to wait upon us both, that I may quietly pass a few months in comparative retirement before I join my family and friends in the country, as their rank and fortune naturally lead them into more gaiety than I should at present like to share. I am not much accustomed to be called upon thus to give an account of myself; but this is my name, and this is my station; and if neither happens to satisfy you, I must seek lodgings elsewhere."

"I beg your pardon, ma'am, I'm sure," re-

plied Mrs. Tompkins, considerably awed by this imposing statement, "but in our line it is quite necessary, and real ladies, as I dare say you are, are always served the better for being known. At what inn is your lady's-maid and your luggage put up, ma'am?"

"At Street's hotel, Mrs. Tompkins; and if we agree about the apartments, I shall go there, pay my bill, and return directly. You have flies here, I think, have you not?.... I have no carriage with me."

"Yes, ma'am, we have flies, and none better; but if it 's only for the luggage, a porter would do better, and 'tis but a step to walk."

The bargain was then concluded, the ladies returned to the hotel, and after a short struggle in the heart of the widow between economy, and her rather particular love of a comfortable dinner, she decided upon an early broiled chicken and mushrooms before her removal, in preference to a doubtful sort of mutton chop after it. But at seven o'clock the two ladies were seated at tea in the drawing-room, the lady's-maid having been initiated by the

factotum of the house into all the mysteries of the neighbouring "shop for everything," and performing her first act of confidential service very much to the satisfaction of her mistress, who could not wonder that a city like Exeter should be dearer than such a little out-of-the-way place as Silverton.

Mrs. Barnaby knew not a single soul in Exeter, and she lay in bed on the following morning for a full hour later than usual, ruminating on the possibilities of making acquaintance with somebody who might serve as a wedge by which she might effect an entry into the society to be found there. Once seen and known, she felt confident that no difficulty would remain, but the first step was not an easy one.

She doubted not, indeed, that she might easily enough have obtained some introductions from among her acquaintance at Silverton, but it was no part of her plans to make her *entrée* into the *beau monde*, even of Exeter, as the widow of an apothecary. "No!" thought she, as she turned herself by a vi-

gorous movement from one side of the bed to the other, "I will carve out my own fortune without any Silverton introductions whatever! I know that I have a head of my own, as well as a face, and when once I have got rid of this nasty gown and that hideous cap, we shall see what can be done."

Walking up and down the High Street, however, which formed nearly her only occupation during all the hours of light, was, she soon found, the only gaiety she could hope for, and it proved a source of mingled joy and woe. To see so many smart people, and so many beautiful bonnets, was an enchantment that made her feel as if she had got to the gates of Paradise; but the impossibility of speaking to the smart people, or wearing the beautiful bonnets, soon turned all the pleasure into bitterness, and she became immeasurably impatient to cure at least one of these miseries, by throwing aside her hated weeds. To do this, soon became, as she said, necessary to her existence; and her landlady at last turned out to be a perfect treasure, from the sympathy and assist-

ance she afforded her in the accomplishment of her wishes.

Mrs. Tompkins had speedily discovered both that her lodger really had money, and that the gentleman of large fortune whom she had lost was the apothecary of Silverton. The respect obtained by the first quite obliterated, in Mrs. Tompkins' eyes, any contempt that might have been generated by the falsehoods which the second brought to light, and on the whole nothing could be more friendly than their intercourse.

"There can be no use, Mrs. Tompkins," said the doleful widow, "do you think there can . . . . in my going on wearing this dismal dress, that almost breaks my heart every time I look at myself? . . . . It is very nearly six months now since my dear Mr. Barnaby died, and I believe people of fashion never wear first mourning longer."

Mr. Barnaby, however, had been alive and well exactly three months after the period named by his widow as that of his death; and that, too, Mrs. Tompkins knew as well as she

did; but Mrs. Tompkins' sister was a milliner, and family affection being stronger within her than any abstract love of propriety, she decidedly voted for laying aside the weeds immediately, there being "no yearthly good," as she well observed, "in any woman's going on breaking her heart by looking at herself in the glass." So the sister was sent for, and after a long consultation in the widow's bed-room, it was decided that the following Sunday should send her to the cathedral in a black satin dress, with lavender-coloured bonnet, fichu, gloves, reticule, and so forth.

Considering the complete dependence of Agnes, and the great aptitude of such a disposition as that of Mrs. Barnaby to keep this ever in her mind, she certainly felt a greater degree of embarrassment at the idea of communicating this resolution to her than might have been expected. Her friends might fairly have drawn an inference considerably in her favour from this, ... namely, that she was ashamed of it. But however respectable its cause, the feeling was not strong enough to offer any effectual

impediment to her purpose, and she came forth from the council-chamber where this great measure had been decided on, wishing, for the moment at least, that Agnes was at the bottom of the sea, but firm in her determination to announce to her the important resolution she had taken, without a moment's further delay.

"I don't know how it is, my dear Agnes," said she, after seating herself, and looking steadfastly at her niece for a minute or two; "but though I don't dislike to see you in deep mourning, the sight of it on myself makes me perfectly wretched. . . . Why should I go on making my poor heart ache, for no reason upon earth that I know of, but because, when people happen to be where they are known by everybody, it is customary to wear a certain dress for a certain number of days and weeks; but, thank Heaven! Agnes, there is not a single soul in all Exeter that knows me, and I really think there is something very like a rebellion against Providence in refusing to take advantage of this lucky circumstance, which doubtless the mercy of Heaven has arranged

on purpose, so as to enable me to spare myself without impropriety. It is easy enough, Agnes, for ordinary-minded women, to wear, for a whole year together, a dress that must remind them every instant of the most dreadful loss a woman can sustain !—it is easy enough for others, but it will not do for me ! . . . . And in justice to myself, and indeed to you too, Agnes, I am determined to make the effort at once, and discard a garb that breaks my poor heart every time I cast my eyes on any part of it. You must, of course, perceive that it is not for myself alone, my dear child, that I make this effort to restore the health and spirits with which nature has hitherto so bountifully blessed me ; . . . . it is indeed chiefly for you, Agnes ! . . . . it is for your sake, my dear, that I am determined, as far as in me lies, to stop the sorrow that is eating into my very vitals. . . . But never be unjust to me, Agnes ! . . . . Whenever you see me shaking off the gloom of my widowed condition, remember it is solely owing to my love for you. . . . Remember this with gratitude, Agnes, and, for the sake of truth,

let others know it too, whenever you have an opportunity of alluding to it."

And now again did young Agnes doubt her power of answering with propriety. The principle of truth was strong within her, and to have expressed either sympathy or gratitude would have been an outrage to this principle, which would have made her hate herself . . . . she could not, she would not do it; and in reply to her aunt's harangue, who seemed to wait for her answer, she only said,

"The dress of a widow is indeed very sad to look upon; no one can doubt that, aunt Barnaby."

"Good Heaven! . . . . then *you* also suffer from the sight of it, my poor child! . . . . Poor dear Agnes! I ought to have thought of this before; . . . . but I will wound your young heart no longer. This week shall end a suffering so heavy, and so unnecessary for us both, and I trust you will never forget what you owe me. And yet, my dear, though I hope and believe I shall be sustained, and find myself capable of making this effort respecting my

own dress, there is a tender weakness still struggling at my heart, Agnes, which would make it very painful to me were I immediately to see you change yours. Do you feel any repugnance, my dear girl, to wearing that deep mourning for your poor uncle for some months longer ?"

Agnes now felt no difficulty whatever in answering as she was expected to do, and very eagerly replied, " Oh ! dear no, aunt . . . . none in the least."

" I rejoice," said the widow, solemnly, " to perceive in you, young as you are, Agnes, feelings so perfectly what they ought to be ; . . . . you would spare me suffering from sadness too profound, yet would you, my child, in all things not injurious to me, desire to testify your deep respect for the invaluable being we have lost. This is exactly what I would wish to see, and I trust you will ever retain a disposition so calculated to make me love you. But look not so sad, my love ! . . . . I really must invent some occupation to cheer and amuse you, Agnes. . . . Let me see . . . . what say you,

dearest, to running some edging for me on a tulle border for my *tour de bonnet?*"

* * * * *

The widow faithfully kept her kind promise to Agnes, and never again (excepting for a short interval that will be mentioned hereafter) did she run the risk of grieving any heart by the sight of deep mourning for her lost Barnaby, for though she restrained herself for some time longer within the sober dignity of black satins and silks as the material of her robes, there was no colour of the rainbow that did not by degrees find its way amidst her trimmings and decorations. During this period all the hours not devoted to the displaying her recovered finery in church or street, were employed in converting cheap muslin into rich embroidery, and labouring to make squares of Scotch cambric assume the appearance of genuine *batiste*, rich with the delicate labours of Moravian needles.

It was a great happiness for Agnes that satin-stitch had never ranked as a necessary

branch of female education at Empton Rectory; had she been able to embroider muslin, her existence would have been dreadful, for, beyond all question, few of her waking hours would have been employed upon anything else; one of Mrs. Barnaby's favourite axioms being, that "there is NOTHING which makes so prodigious a difference in a lady's dress, as her wearing a great profusion of good work!". . . . So a great profusion of good work she was quite determined to wear, and deep was her indignation at the culpable negligence of Mrs. Wilmot, upon finding that an accomplishment "so particularly lady-like, and so very useful," had been utterly neglected.

To invent an occupation for herself during the hours thus employed by her aunt, soon became the subject of all Agnes's meditations. She knew that it must be something that should not annoy or inconvenience Mrs. Barnaby in the slightest degree, and it was this knowledge, perhaps, which made her too discreet to ask for the hire of a piano-forte, for which, nevertheless, she longed, very much like a hart for

the water brook; for the musical propensities of her father and mother had descended to her, and of all the pleasures she had yet tasted, that derived from her study and practice of music had been the greatest. But that her aunt should pay money for no other purpose than for her to amuse herself by making a noise in their only sitting-room, was quite out of the question. So the piano she mentally abandoned for ever; but there were other studies that she had pursued at Empton, which, if permitted to renew, even without the aid of any master, would greatly embellish an existence, which the poor girl often felt to be as heavy a gift as could well have been bestowed upon a mortal. Having at length decided what it was she would ask for, she took courage, hemmed twice, and then said,—

"Should you have any objection, aunt, to my endeavouring by myself to go on with my French and Italian, while you are at work?. . . . I am sometimes afraid that I shall forget all I have learned."

"I am sure I hope not, and it will be very

stupid, and very wicked of you, Agnes, if you do. Your teaching is all we ever got out of that hunch-backed Jesabel of an aunt; and you must always recollect, you know, that it is very possible you may have to look to this as your only means of support. I am sure I am excessively fond of you, I may say passionately attached to you, it is quite impossible you can ever deny that; but yet we must neither of us ever forget that it is likely enough I may marry again, and have a family; and in that case, my dear, much as I love you, (and my disposition is uncommonly affectionate,) it will be my bounden duty to think of my husband and children, which would probably make it necessary for you to go out as a governess or teacher at a school."

"I understand that very well, aunt," replied Agnes, greatly comforted by the prospect thus held out, "and that is a great additional reason for my endeavouring to render myself fit to undertake such a situation. I was getting on very well at Empton. Will you be so very kind as to let me try to get on by myself here?"

"Certainly, Agnes. . . . I shall wish to encourage your laudable endeavours; . . . . but I must say it was a most abominable shame in that Mrs. Wilmot not to teach you satin-stitch, which, after all, is the only really lady-like way in which a young woman can assist in maintaining herself. Just look at this collar, Agnes; . . . . the muslin did not cost sixpence . . . . certainly not more than sixpence, and I 'd venture to say that I could not get the fellow of it in any shop in Exeter for two guineas . . . . It is long before French, or Italian either, will bring such a percentage as that. . . . Now listen to me, Agnes, before you set-to, upon your stupid books again. . . . I 'll tell you what I am willing to do for you. I hate teaching too much to attempt instructing you myself, but I will pay a woman to come here to give you lessons, if you will tell me truly and sincerely that you shall be able to learn it, and to stick to it. I am so fond of you, Agnes, so particularly fond of you, that I should not at all mind keeping you on, even when I am married, if you will take fairly and honestly to this ele-

gant and lady-like employment, ... for I should never have any difficulty, I dare say, in disposing of what you did, beyond what I might want for myself and children—that is, provided you bring yourself to work in this sort of perfectly elegant style. What d 'ye say to it, Agnes ?"

" You are very kind, aunt," replied the terrified girl, blushing violently, " but indeed, indeed, I am afraid, that as I have never begun yet, I should find it quite impossible to bring my stubborn fingers to work as yours do. I never was particularly clever in learning to work, I believe, and what you do is so very nice that I could never hope to do anything like it."

" Perhaps you are right, my dear, ... it is not every woman whose fingers can move as mine do," replied Mrs. Barnaby, looking down complacently at the mincing paces of her needle ; . . . . " but your hands are not clumsy, Agnes, rather the contrary, I must say ; and I can't but think, child, that if you were to set-to with hearty good will, and practise morn-

ing, noon, and night, it is very likely you might learn enough, after a year or two of constant pains-taking, to enable you to give up all your wearisome books at once and for ever. That is worth thinking of twice, I promise you."

"Indeed, indeed, dear aunt, I never should make anything of it!" . . . . exclaimed Agnes eagerly; "I am sure it is one of the things that people must begin early, ... and I don't at all dislike books, ... and I would rather go out to teach, if you please, than work muslin, ... for I am quite, quite sure that I never should do it well, no, not even decently."

"So much the worse for you, child! . . . . At any rate, I have done my duty by offering to have you taught: please to remember that."

"And may I begin then, aunt, with my books?"

"And where are you to get books, Miss Agnes? . . . . It is of no use to expect I can buy them, and that you will find. . . . I see already that Silverton is no rule for the rest of the world as to expense, and that I shall have quite enough to do with my money without

wasting it on trumpery; . . . . so, pray, don't look to my buying books for you, for most assuredly I shall do no such thing."

"Oh no, aunt! . . . . I do not think of it,—there is not the least occasion for such extravagance; you shall see how well I am provided." And so saying, she ran out of the room, and in a few minutes returned with a small and very neat mahogany box, which in travelling had been carefully covered by a leathern case, and which her aunt had suffered to accompany her unchallenged, because she presumed it to be the treasury of all "her best things;" a species of female property for which the widow had never-failing respect, even when it did not belong to herself, which was perhaps more than could be said respecting any other sort of property whatever.

Agnes brought this box in with difficulty, for though small, it was heavy, and when opened displayed to the somewhat surprised eyes of her aunt a collection of tiny volumes, so neatly fitting their receptacle, as to prove that they must have been made to suit each other.

"This was Mr. Wilmot's present to me, aunt," said Agnes, taking out a volume to exhibit its pretty binding. "Was it not kind of him?"

"It looks very extravagant, I think, for a man whose wife keeps school. . . . He must have been sadly puzzled to know what to do with his money."

"No, aunt, that was not the reason, for Mr. Wilmot is not extravagant at all; but he told me that aunt Betsy, instead of paying every half year, like other people, insisted upon giving him the five years' stipend for me, as well as the money for my clothes, all at once; and that he had always determined upon laying out the interest this sum had brought in a present for me. I think it was very generous of him."

"And what in the world have you got there, child? All grammars and spelling-books, I suppose; . . . . but it's the most senseless quantity of school books that ever were got together for one person, I think. . . . I see no generosity in anything so very silly."

"They are not school books, aunt, I assure you."

"Then what are they, pray? Why do you make such a mystery about it?"

"Oh! it 's no mystery; . . . . but I did not know. . . . I will read you the titles, if you please, aunt. Here are Shakspeare, Milton, Spencer, and Gray; . . . . these are all my English books."

"And what are these?"

"Racine, Corneille, La Fontaine, and Boileau."

"What useless trash! . . . . And these?"

"Dante, Tasso, and Petrarch; . . . . and these six larger volumes are the 'componimenti lirici' of various authors."

"Oh goodness, child! . . . . don't jabber your stupid school jargon to me. . . . There! . . . . take them all away again; I can't very well see how they are to help you make a governess of yourself: grammars, I should think, and dictionaries, would be more to the purpose for that sort of profitable usefulness."

"And I have got them too, aunt, in my

clothes trunk; and if you will but be pleased to let me give my time to it, I am quite sure that I shall get on very well."

"Get on! . . . . get on to what, child?"

"To reading both French and Italian with facility, ... and perhaps to writing both with tolerable correctness."

"Well, ... if it will enable you to get your bread one of these days, I am sure that I don't wish to hinder it,—so go to work as soon as you will,—only pray don't let me hear any more about it, for I quite hate the sort of thing,—though of course, my dear, if I was in your situation, I should know it was my duty to think differently. But those whom Providence has blessed with wealth, have a right to indulge their taste, ... and my taste is altogether that of a lady." Oh! Oh!

From this time the aching void in the heart, and almost in the intellect of Agnes, seemed supplied. Her aunt, when she did not want her as a walking companion, suffered her to go on reading and scribbling to her heart's content, and the more readily, perhaps, from its giving

her the air of being still a child learning lessons, which was exactly the footing on which she wished to keep her, if possible, for another year or two, as she was by no means insensible to the inconvenience of having a grown-up niece, while still in the pride of beauty herself.

In this manner the period allotted for their stay at Exeter wore away; Mrs. Barnaby's wardrobe, embroidery, and all, was quite ready for display; Betty Jacks, alias Jerningham, had learned to look exceedingly like a disreputable young woman, to run of errands, and to *iron out* tumbled dresses; the bright sun of June had succeeded the lovely temperature of a Devonshire spring, and everything seemed to invite the adventurous widow to a wider field of display. But before she made this onward movement from which she hoped so much, it was necessary to apprize her sister-in-law, Mrs. Peters, of her affectionate intention of passing a few months at Clifton, in order to become acquainted with her and her family. The letter by which this intention was announced, is too characteristic of my heroine to be omitted.

"My dearest Sister,

"Under the dreadful calamity that has fallen upon me, no idea has suggested the slightest glimpse of comfort to my widowed heart but the hope of becoming acquainted with my lost Barnaby's sister! Beloved Margaret! . . . . So let me call you, for so have I been used to hear you called by HIM! . . . . Beloved Margaret! Let me hope that from you, and your charming family, I shall find the sympathy and affection I so greatly need.

"Your admirable brother . . . my lost but never-to-be-forgotten husband . . . . was as successful as he deserved to be in the profession of which he was the highest ornament, and left an ample fortune,—the whole of which, as you know, he bequeathed to me with a confidence and liberality well befitting the perfect, the matchless love, which united us. But, alas! my sister, Providence denied us a pledge of this tender love, and where then can I so naturally look for the ultimate possessors of his noble fortune as amongst your family? I have one young

niece, still almost a child, whom I shall bring with me to Clifton. But though I am passionately attached to her, my sense of justice is too strong to permit my ever suffering her claims to interfere with those more justly founded. When we become better acquainted, my dearest Margaret, you will find that this sense of what is right is the rule and guide of all my actions, and I trust you will feel it to be a proof of this, that my style and manner of living are greatly within my means. In fact, I never cease to remember, dear sister, that, though the widow of my poor Barnaby, I am the daughter of the well-born but most unfortunate clergyman of Silverton, who was obliged to sell his long-descended estate in consequence of the treachery of a friend who ruined him. Thus, while the high blood which flows in my veins teaches me to do what is honourable, the unexpected poverty which fell upon my own family, makes me feel that there is more real dignity in living with economy, than in spending what my confiding husband left at my disposal, and thus putting it out of my power to increase it for the benefit of his natural heirs.

"This will, I hope, explain to you satisfactorily my not travelling with my own carriage, and my having no other retinue than one lady's-maid. Alas! . . . . it is not in pomp or parade that a truly widowed heart can find consolation!

"Let me hear from you, my dear sister, and have the kindness to tell me where you think I had better drive, on arriving at Clifton. With most affectionate love to Mr. Peters, and the blessing of a fond aunt to all your dear children, I remain, dearest Margaret,

"Your ever devoted sister,

"MARTHA BARNABY."

This letter was received by Mrs. Peters at the breakfast-table, round which were assembled three daughters, one son, and her husband. The lady read it through in silence, cast her eyes rapidly over it a second time, and then handed it over to her spouse with an air of some solemnity, though something very like a smile passed across her features at the same moment.

Mr. Peters also read the letter, but not like his lady, in silence.

"Very kind of her indeed! . . . . Poor dear lady! . . . . a true mourner, that 's plain enough to be seen. . . . She must be an excellent good woman, my dear, this widow of poor Barnaby; and I 'm heartily glad she is coming among us. Your aunt Barnaby's coming, girls, and I hope you 'll all behave so as to make her love you. . . . . Is there any objection, Margaret, to the children's seeing this letter?"

"None at all," replied the lady. . . . "excepting . . . ."

"Excepting what, my dear? . . . . I am sure it is a letter that would do her honour anywhere, and I should be proud to read it on the exchange. . . . What do you mean by excepting?"

"It is no matter. . . . The girls and I can talk about it afterwards, ... and James, I think, will understand it very clearly at once."

"Understand it? . . . . to be sure he will. . . I never read a better letter, or one more easily

understood, in my life.—Here, James, read it aloud to your sisters."

The young man obeyed, and read it very demurely to the end, though, more than once, his laughing blue eye sent a glance to his mother that satisfied her she was right in her estimate of his acuteness.

"That's an aunt worth having, isn't it?". . . said old Peters, standing up, and taking his favourite station on the hearth-rug, with his back to the grate, though no fire was in it. . . . . "Now I hope we shall have no airs and graces, because she comes from a remote part of the country, but that you will one and all do your best to make her see that you are worthy of her favour."

"I will do all I can to shew myself a dutiful and observant nephew. . . . But don't you think, sir, that 'the lady doth protest too much?'"

"Oh! but she'll keep her word,". . . . replied his mother, laughing.

"Keep her word? . . . . to be sure she will, poor lady! She is broken-hearted and broken-

spirited, as it 's easy to see by her letter," observed the worthy Mr. Peters; "and I do hope, wife, that you will be very kind to her."

"And where shall I tell her to drive, Mr. Peters?"

"To the York hotel, my dear, I should think."

"Do you know that I rather fancy she expects we should ask her to come here?"

"No! .... Well, that did not strike me. Let me see the letter again.... But it 's no matter; whether she does or does not it may be quite as well to do it; .... and she says she likes to save her money, poor thing."

The father and son then set off to walk to Bristol, and Mrs. Peters and her three daughters were left to sit in judgment on the letter, and then to answer it.

"I see what you think, mamma," said the eldest girl, as the door closed after them; "you have no faith in this widowed aunt's lachrymals?"

"Not so much, Mary, as I might have, perhaps, if she said less about her sorrows."

"And her generous intentions in our favour, mamma,". . . . said the youngest, "perhaps you have no faith in them either."

"Not so much, Lucy," said the lady, repeating her words, "as I might have, perhaps, if she said less about it."

"I hope you are deceived, all of you," said Elizabeth, the second girl, very solemnly; "and I must say I think it is very shocking to put such dreadful constructions upon the conduct of a person you know so little about."

"I am sure I put no constructions," replied Mary, "I only ventured to guess at mamma's."

"And I beg to declare that my sins against this generous new relative have gone no farther," said Lucy.

"Well, well, we shall see, girls," said the lively mother. "Let us all start fair for the loaves and fishes; . . . . and now, Elizabeth, ring the bell, let the breakfast be removed, and you will see that I shall reply in a very sober and proper way to this pathetic communication."

The letter Mrs. Peters composed and read to her daughters, was approved even by the

sober-minded and conscientious Elizabeth; it contained an obliging offer of accommodation at their house in Rodney Place, till Mrs. Barnaby should have found lodgings to suit her, and ended with kind regards from all the family, and "*I beg you to believe me your affectionate sister, Margaret Peters.*"

So far, everything prospered with our widow. This invitation was exactly what she wished, and having answered, accepted, and fixed the day and probable hour at which it was to begin, Mrs. Barnaby once more enjoyed the delight of preparing herself for a journey that was to lead her another step towards the goal she had in view.

CHAPTER XV.

THE ENTRÉE OF MRS. BARNABY IN MRS. PETERS'S DRAWING-ROOM.—FAMILY CONSULTATIONS.—ARRANGEMENTS FOR MISS WILLOUGHBY'S DRESS FOR SOME TIME TO COME.

In one respect Mrs. Barnaby was considerably more fortunate than she had ventured to hope, for the "clothier," and the clothier's family, held a much higher station in society than she had anticipated. Mr. Peters had for many years been an active and prosperous manufacturer, neither above his business, nor below enjoying the ample fortune acquired by it; his wife was a lively, agreeable, lady-like woman, formed to be well received by any society that the chances of commerce might have thrown her into, being sufficiently well educated and sufficiently gifted to do credit to

the highest, and without any pretensions which might have caused her either to give or receive pain, had the chances been against her, and she had become the wife of a poor instead of a rich manufacturer. The eldest son, who was excellently well calculated to follow the steps of his lucky father, was already married and settled at Frome, with a share of the business of which he was now the most efficient support; the younger son, who was intended for the church, was at present at home for a few months previous to his commencing term-keeping at Oxford; and the three daughters, from appearance, education, and manners, were perfectly well qualified to fill the situation of first-rate belles in the Clifton ball-room. Their house and its furniture, their carriage and establishment, were all equally beyond the widow's expectations, so that, in short, a very agreeable surprise awaited her arrival at Clifton.

It was a lovely evening of the last week in June, that a Bristol hackney-coach deposited Mrs. Barnaby, her niece, her Jerningham, and her trunks, at No. 4, Rodney Place. The

ladies of the Peters family had just left the dinner-table, and were awaiting their relative in the drawing-room. Let it not be supposed that the interesting widow made her *entrée* among them in the dress she had indulged in during her residence at Exeter; she was not so thoughtless; and so well had poor Agnes already learned to know her, that she felt little surprise when she saw her, the day before they left that city, draw forth every melancholy article that she had discarded, and heard her say,—

"My life passes, Agnes, in a constant watchfulness of the feelings of others. . . . It was for your sake, dear girl, that I so early put off this sad attire, and the fear of wounding the feelings of my dear sister-in-law now induces me to resume it, for a few days at least, that she may feel I come to find my first consolation from her!"

So the next morning Mrs. Barnaby stepped into the stage-coach that was to convey her to Bristol with her lilacs, her greys, and her pink whites, all carefully shrouded from sight

in band-boxes, and herself a perfect model of conjugal woe.

"Shew me to my sister!" said the widow, as soon as she had counted all her own packages, and with a cambric handkerchief, without an atom of embroidery, in her hand, her voice ready to falter, her knees to tremble, and her tears to flow, she followed the servant up stairs.

Mrs. Peters came very decorously forward to meet her, but she was, perhaps, hardly prepared for the very long embrace in which her unknown sister held her. Mrs. Peters was a very little woman, and was almost lost to sight in the arms and the draperies of the widow; but when at last she was permitted to emerge, Agnes was cheered and greatly comforted by the pleasing reception she gave her; while the young ladies in their turn (with the exception of the grave and reasonable Elizabeth, perhaps,) submitted rather impatiently to the lingering and sobbing embraces of their new aunt, as they had by no means gazed their fill on the lovely creature she brought with her.

Though there was certainly no reason in the world why the niece of Mrs. Barnaby should not be beautiful, both Mrs. Peters and her daughters gazed on her with something like astonishment. It seemed as if it were strange that they had not heard before of what was so very much out of the common way; and so great was the effect her appearance produced, and so engrossing the attention she drew, that Mrs. Barnaby passed almost uncriticised; and when the ladies of the family met afterwards, a female committee, in Mrs. Peters's dressing-room, and asked each other what they thought of their new relation, no one seemed prepared to say more of her than .... "Oh! .... she has been handsome, certainly .... only she rouges, and is a great deal too tall; .... But, did you ever see so beautiful, so elegant a creature, as her niece?" Such, with a few variations, according to the temper of the speaker, was the judgment of all.

Before this judgment was passed upon the new arrivals in the dressing-room, the aunt and niece had also undergone the scrutiny of

both father and son, who had joined them at the tea-table.

They, too, had held their secret committee, and freely enough exchanged opinions on the subject.

"Upon my word, James, she is an extremely fine woman, and I really never saw any person conduct herself better upon such an occasion. All strangers, you know, and she, poor soul! .... with her heart breaking to think what she has lost! .... I really cannot but admire her, and I flatter myself we shall all find means to make her like us too. I hope you agree with me, James, in my notions about her!"

"Oh! dear, yes. ... I am sure I do .... a very excellent person—indeed, I have no doubt of it. ... But did you ever, sir, see such a creature as her niece? She seemed to me something more like a vision—an emanation —than a reality."

"A what, James?"

"I beg your pardon, my dear sir, but I believe I have lost my senses already. Don't

you think, father, I had better set off for Oxford to-morrow morning ?"

"Good gracious ! no, James. . . . Why should you go away just as your aunt Barnaby is come, and she having such kind intentions towards you all ?"

"Very well, sir," replied the gay-hearted youth ; "if such be your pleasure, I will brave the danger, and trust to Providence. . . . But, good night, father ! . . . . I must say one word to my sisters before they go to bed" . . . . And the privileged intruder entered his mother's dressing-room while the party were still discussing the merits of the new-comers.

"Oh ! here comes James," exclaimed Lucy, making room for him on the sofa where she was seated. "That 's delightful ! Come, mamma, sit down again . . . . let us hear what this accomplished squire of dames says of her. . . . Do you think now, James, that Kattie M'Gee is the prettiest girl you ever saw ?"

"Prettiest ?—why, yes, prettiest, as contradistinguished from most beautiful,—perhaps I do," replied the young man, with an ex-cathedra

sort of air; .... "but if you mean to ask who I think the very loveliest creation ever permitted to consecrate the earth by setting her heaven-born feet upon it, I reply Miss Agnes Willoughby!"

"Bravo! .... That will do," replied Lucy. "I thought how it would fare with the puir Scottish lassie the moment I beheld this new divinity."

"Poor James! I am really sorry for you this time," said his mother, "for I cannot give you much hope of a cure from the process that has hitherto proved so successful.... I see no chance whatever of a "fairer she" coming to cauterize, by a new flame, the wound inflicted by this marvellous Miss Willoughby."

"They jest at scars who never felt a wound!" exclaimed the young man fervently .... "Mary! .... Elizabeth! .... have you none of you a feeling of pity for me? .... Oh! how I envy you all! .... for you can gaze and bask in safety in the beams of this glorious brightness, while I, as my mother says, am doomed to be scorched incurably!"

"If you have any discretion, James, you will run away," said his eldest sister. . . . "Her generous aunt, you know, has declared that she shall never have any of uncle Barnaby's money; and if you stay you may depend upon it that, while you are making love to the niece, I shall be winning the heart of the aunt, and contrive by my amiable cajoleries to get your share and my own too of all she so nobly means to bestow upon us."

"Nonsense, Mary! . . . . Don't believe her, James!" . . . . cried the worthy matter-of-fact Elizabeth. "If you are really in love with her already, I think it would be a very good scheme indeed for you to marry her, because then Mrs. Barnaby could be doing her duty to you both at once."

"Very true, Elizabeth," . . . . said the mother; "but you none of you recollect that while you have been regaling yourselves with the charms of the young lady, I have been worn to a thread by listening to the noble sentiments of the old . . . . old? . . . . mercy on me! the *elder* one. Pray, offer to set off with them,

James, in quest of lodgings as soon as breakfast is over to-morrow, for I foresee that I cannot stand it long. . . . And now go away all of you, for I am tired to death. Good night! . . . . Good night!"

And now let us see the impression made on the aunt and niece by their reception, for, though separate rooms were prepared for them, Mrs. Barnaby did not permit the weary Agnes to enjoy the supreme luxury of this solitary apartment till she had indulged herself with a little gossip.

Mrs. Peters had herself shewn Mrs. Barnaby to her room, at the door of which she was preparing to utter a final good night, but was not permitted to escape without another sisterly embrace, and being held by the hand for some minutes, while the widow said,—

"You know not how soothing it is to my feelings, dearest Margaret! . . . . you must allow me to call you Margaret . . . . you know not how soothing, how delightful it is to my feelings to lay my head and poor aching heart to rest under the roof of my dear Barnaby's

sister! . . . . Alas! none but those who have suffered as I have done, can fully understand this. . . . And yet I so much wish you to understand me, dearest sister! . . . . I so long to have my heart appreciated by you! . . . . Step in for one moment, will you?" . . . . And the request was seconded by a gentle pulling, which sufficed to bring the imprisoned Mrs. Peters safely within the door. . . . "I cannot part with you till I have explained a movement . . . . a rush of sentiment, I may call it,—that has come upon me since I entered this dear dwelling. The time is come, is fully come, you know, when fashion dictates the laying aside this garb of woe; and as my excellent mother brought me up in all things respectfully to follow the usages of society, I have been struggling to do so in the present instance . . . . and have actually already furnished myself with a needful change of apparel . . . . never yet, however, dearest Margaret!"—and here she pressed her handkerchief to her eyes,—"never yet have I had the courage to wear it. But, thank Heaven! I now feel strengthened, and when we meet

to-morrow you shall see the influence the sight of you and your dear family has had upon me. And now, good night, my sister! . . . . I will detain you no longer, ... but do explain to your charming family, dear Margaret! how this sudden change in my appearance has been wrought . . . . Good night! . . . . But where is Agnes? . . . . Poor love! she will not sleep, even in your elegant mansion, till she has received my parting kiss. She perfectly dotes upon me! . . . . Will you have the kindness to let her be sent to me?"

* * * * *

In the happiest state of spirits from the conscious skill with which she had managed this instantaneous change of garments . . . . delighted with the unexpected elegance of the house, and all within it . . . . with her reception, ... and, above all else, with the recollection of the able manner in which she had propitiated the favour of these important relatives by her letter, the widow rang the bell for her Jerningham, and anxiously awaited her

arrival and that of her niece, that she might indulge a little in the happy, boastful vein that swelled her bosom.

"Well, my dear," she broke out, the instant Agnes entered, "I hope you like my brother and sister, and my nieces and my nephew. . . . Upon my word, Agnes, you are the luckiest girl in the world! What a family for you to be introduced to, on a footing of the greatest intimacy too, and that on your very first introduction into life! They must be exceedingly wealthy . . . . there can be no doubt of it. I suppose you have seen a great many servants, Jerningham?"

"Oh my!—sure enough, ma'am! . . . . There's the footman, and the boy, and the coachman."

"A coachman!" interrupted Mrs. Barnaby; "they keep a carriage, then? . . . . I really had no idea of it. My dear Barnaby never told me that . . . . I wonder at it! . . . . And well, Jerningham, how many maids are there?

"Oh lor! ma'am, I hardly can tell, for I was tooked to sit in one room, and there was one, and maybe two maids, as bided in another;

that was the kitchen I *sem*, ma'am, and everything was so elegant, ma'am. . . ."

"I dare say it was, Jerningham, ... and you must be very careful to keep up your own consequence, and mine too, in such a house as this. You understand me, Jerningham: I have already, you remember, given you some hints. . . . You have not forgotten, I hope?"

"No, that I haven't, ma'am," replied the girl; "and . . . . I mean to tell 'em . . . ." but looking at Agnes, she stopped short, as it seemed, because she was there.

"Very well . . . . that 's quite right, ... and I 'll give you these gloves of mine. Mend them neatly to-morrow morning, and never be seen to go out without gloves, Jerningham. . . . And now unpack my night-bag, ... and you had better just open my trunk too. Remember to learn the hour of breakfast, and come to me exactly an hour and a half before. I shall put on my black satin to-morrow, and my lavender trimmings. . . . You know where to find them all, don't you?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Very well, forget nothing, and I will give you that cap with the lilac bows that I dirtied-out at Exeter. . . . Mercy on me, Agnes, how you are yawning!"

"I *am* very tired, aunt, and I will wish you good night now, if you please."

"What! . . . . without one word of all you have seen? Well, you are a stupid girl, Agnes, and that's the fact. . . . You find nothing, I suppose, to like or admire in my sister's house, or in those delightful, fashionable-looking young people?"

"Yes, indeed I do, aunt, ... only I think I am too sleepy to do justice to them. They are very agreeable, and I like them very much indeed."

"I am glad to hear it, child, ... and I hope you will do your best to make yourself agreeable to them in return. If you were not such a baby, that young man would make a capital match for you, I dare say. But we must not think about that, I suppose. . . . And, now you may go; . . . . but stay one minute. Observe, Agnes, I have explained to my sister

all my feelings about my mourning, and you must take care to let the young people understand that you keep on with crape and bombasin some time longer, because you like it best. . . . And, by the by, I may as well tell you at once, my dear, that as you look so particularly well in deep mourning, and are so fond of wearing it, you had better not think of a change for some time to come. I am sorry to tell you, my dear, that I find everything as I come up the country a vast deal indeed dearer than I expected, and therefore it will be absolutely necessary to save every penny I can. Now the fact is, that my mourning has been taken so much care of, and altogether so little worn, that the best gown is very nearly as good as new, and the worst has still a deal of wear left in it. So, I think the best thing we can do, Agnes, is to have both of them made up to fit you, that is, when your own are quite worn-out; . . . . and my bonnets too, if I can teach Jerningham to wash the crape nicely in a little small beer, they will come out looking quite like new, ...

and they are so becoming to you! . . . . and in this way, you see, my dear, a great many pounds may be saved."

"Thank you, aunt," meekly replied Agnes.

"Well, there 's a good girl, go to bed now, and be sure to make the young ladies understand that you go on with crape and bombasin because you like it."

CHAPTER XVI.

MRS. PETERS BECOMES UNEASY, BUT CONTRIVES TO ATTAIN HER OBJECT.—A PLEASANT WALK DISCOVERED TO BE A GOOD MEANS OF MAKING A PARTY OF YOUNG PEOPLE ACQUAINTED WITH EACH OTHER.—MRS. PETERS SHEWS MUCH PROMPTITUDE AND EXPERIENCE IN TAKING LODGINGS.—SHE ALSO DISCOVERS THE BEST MODE OF LIONIZING A LADY WHO IS TOO BEAUTIFUL.—ANOTHER COUNTRY WALK IMPROVES THE INTIMACY BETWEEN THE YOUNG LADIES.

The impressions mutually received overnight, were not greatly changed when the parties met again on the following morning; excepting, indeed, that Mr. Peters was rather surprised at seeing the widow looking so very smart, and so very much handsomer.

The young people could hardly admire Agnes more than they had done before, though they confessed that they were not fully aware

of the particular beauty of her hair, or of the perfect symmetry of her person, till they had seen her by daylight; but Mrs. Peters pleaded guilty to disliking her affectionate sister quite as much on Tuesday morning as she had done on Monday night; and as the sun shone brightly she took advantage of this to introduce the subject that was decidedly next her heart.

"You must take care to put this beautiful day to profit, Mrs. Barnaby," said she. "Of course you have heard of our rocks, and our downs, Miss Willoughby? and you could not look at them through a more favourable atmosphere. . . . We shall have time to take you to our famous windmill, and to shew you some lodgings too, Mrs. Barnaby, for we Bristol people never sacrifice business to pleasure. I thought of you yesterday morning when I saw a bill up at Sion Row . . . . some of the prettiest lodgings in Clifton, and it will be dangerous to put off looking at them, they are so very likely to be taken."

The good-natured Mr. Peters felt a great inclination to say that there could be no need

of hurry in looking out for lodgings, as he should be so very glad to keep the ladies where they were; but, though the most perfect harmony (real harmony) and good feeling existed between Mr. Peters and his wife, a very salutary understanding also existed, that whenever she said anything that he did not quite comprehend, which not unfrequently happened, he was neither to contradict nor observe upon it till the matter had been inquired into between them when they were *tête-à-tête*, upon which occasions he always found her as ready to hear as to render reasons, and it was rare indeed that the conference broke up without their being of the same mind.

In conformity to this excellent rule, the good man suffered this lodging-hunting expedition to be arranged without offering any objection, and set off on his daily walk to the Bristol exchange, with no other observation than that he should leave James to escort them, as he did not think he should find him a very gay companion if he took him away.

The ladies then immediately dispersed to

bonnet and cloak themselves, and in a few minutes the whole party, amounting to seven, all turned out upon the broad flagstones of Rodney Place, and dividing into three couples, with James hanging on upon that of which Agnes was one, proceeded, headed by Mrs. Barnaby and Mrs. Peters, towards Sion Row.

Before they reached it, however, James called a council with his eldest sister and Miss Willoughby, upon the necessity of so very large a party all going to look for lodgings.

"Would it not be better, Mary," said the young man, "for us to take Miss Willoughby to the down? The others can follow if they like it, you know, and we shall be sure to meet them coming back."

"Very well, then, tell mamma so, will you?" replied the young lady, turning off in the direction indicated.

The message caused the elder ladies to stop; Mrs. Peters looked very much as if she did not like her share in the division, but, after a moment's hesitation, she good-humouredly nodded assent, and walked on, Elizabeth, (who in her

heart believed Mrs. Barnaby was the kindest person in the world, because she said so,) joining the elder ladies, and the four others striking off towards the beautiful rising ground on the right.

There is a sort of free-masonry among young people which is never brought into action till the elders are out of the way, and it was probably for this reason that Agnes felt better acquainted with her companions, before they had pursued their walk for half an hour, than all the talk of the preceding evening, or that of the breakfast-table, had enabled her to become. Something, too, might have been effected in the way of familiarity by an accident arising from the nature of the scenery upon which they paused to gaze. On reaching the windmill, and looking down upon the course of the Avon, winding its snake-like path at their feet, with the woods of Leigh, rich in their midsummer foliage, feathering down on one side, and rocks of limestone, bright in their veins of red and grey, freshly opened by the quarrying, rising beautifully bold on the other, Agnes stood wrapt

in ecstasy. All she had yet seen of Nature had been the flowery meads and blooming apple orchards of the least romantic part of Devonshire; and though there was beauty enough in this to awaken that love of landscape which is always one of the strongest feelings in a finely-organized mind, she was quite unprepared for the sort of emotion the scene she now beheld occasioned her. She pressed forward before her companions, and, utterly unmindful of danger, leaned over the verge of the giddy precipice, till young Peters, really alarmed, seized her by the arm and drew her back again. Tears were in her eyes, and her face was as pale as marble.

"My dear Miss Willoughby!" said Mary, kindly, "the precipice has made you giddy, . . . I do believe, if James had not seized you, that you would have fallen!"

"Oh! no, no," replied Agnes, shaking her head, while a bright flush instantly chased the paleness, "I do assure you I was not in any danger at all . . . . only I never saw anything so beautiful before."

"Let us sit down," said Lucy. "There is no dampness whatever. It is almost the first day of real summer, and the air is delicious. Is it not beautiful here, Agnes?"

A look of gratitude, and almost of affection, was the answer; and as the little party sat together, inhaling that most delicious of essences which the sun draws forth when herbs and flowers are what he shines upon, with a lovely landscape around, and each other's fair young faces and blithe voices beside them, was it wonderful that the recent date of their acquaintance should be forgotten, or that they laughed, and chatted, and looked about, and enjoyed themselves, with as much gaiety and as little restraint as if they had known each other for years.

They were all very happy, and a full hour passed unheeded as they amused themselves, sometimes with idle talk, sometimes with listening to the reverberating thunder that arose from the blasting of the rocks below them, and sometimes by sitting silent for a whole minute together, pulling up handfuls of the fragrant thyme with which their couch was strewed.

They were all very happy, but none of the party had any notion of the happiness of Agnes. It was the first moment of real positive enjoyment she had tasted since she left Empton, and a feeling like renewed life seemed to seize upon her senses. Without reasoning about it, she had felt, during the last few months, as if it were her fate to be unhappy, and that all she had to do was to submit; but, to her equal delight and astonishment, she now found that nobody ever was so much mistaken, for that she was one of the most particularly happy people in the world, wanting nothing but sun, sweet air, and a lovely landscape, to make her forget that such a thing as sorrow existed; and the only thought that threw a shadow upon the brightness of her spirit, was that which suggested that she must have been very wicked to have doubted for a moment the goodness of God, who had formed this beautiful world on purpose to make people happy.

But, though every moment of such an hour as this seems to leave its own sweet and lasting impression on the memory, the whole is soon

gone; and when Mary, with the wisdom called for by being the eldest of the party, jumped up, exclaiming that they had quite forgotten their appointment to meet her mother on the down, Agnes roused herself with a sigh, as if she had passed through a momentary trance.

They met the rest of their party, however, though the order of the meeting was changed, for it was our young set who encountered the others on their return, after a ramble of half a mile or so towards the turnpike, which it is probable had not been enlivened by any such raptures as those felt by Agnes.

The two parties now joined, and the conversation was general, not very lively perhaps, but by no means devoid of interest to Agnes, who had fallen so heartily in love with St. Vincent's rocks, as to make her hear of being fixed for some time in their neighbourhood with the greatest delight.

"Well, ma'am, have you seen any lodgings that you liked?" said the eldest Miss Peters to Mrs. Barnaby.

"Yes, my dear Mary, I have, indeed," re-

plied the widow; "thanks to your dear kind mamma, who has really been indefatigable. Clifton seems exceedingly full, I think, and I am not sorry for it, for my poor dear Agnes really wants a little change to rouse her spirits ....That mourning habit that she so delights in, is, I am sorry to say, but too just a type of her disposition."

The brother and sisters, who had so lately shared in the gay hilarity of Agnes's laughter, exchanged glances, but said nothing, while she herself blushing, and half laughing again at the same recollection, changed the subject by saying,—

"And have you taken lodgings, aunt?"

"Yes, my dear, I have .... small but very delightful lodgings in Sion Row .... the very Row, Agnes, that you heard my dear sister mention this morning as so desirable! .... and which we quite despaired of getting at first, for there appeared to be all sorts of difficulties. "But," turning to Mrs. Peters, "you seem to understand all these things, Margaret, so admirably well! You made the good woman do

exactly what you pleased. . . . So clever, ... and so like your poor dear brother ! . . . ."

" My poor dear brother must have been wonderfully changed if he ever shewed himself half so self-willed !" thought the conscious Mrs. Peters, who had certainly used something like bribery and corruption to remove all difficulties in procuring for her sister-in-law apartments, which must by agreement be entered upon the following day.

" But you have got them, aunt, at last ?. . . . I am so glad of it ! . . . . for I think Clifton the most beautiful place I ever saw in my life."

" Falling in love with the young man, that is quite clear," thought the active-minded widow.

A fresh return of happiness awaited Agnes on re-entering the house. Lucy threw her wraps aside and sat down to the piano-forte : she played prettily, and sang, too, well enough to delight the thirsty ears of Agnes, who had never heard a note, excepting at the cathedral at Exeter, since she had left her school. The evident pleasure which her performance gave to her young auditor, encouraged the good-natured

Lucy to proceed, and, excepting during an interval occupied by eating sandwiches for luncheon, she continued to play and sing till three o'clock.

Though by no means one of those performers who like to keep the instrument wholly to themselves, it never occurred to her to ask Agnes to play. There was something so childishly eager in the delight with which she listened, that Lucy fancied it was the novelty of the thing that so captivated her attention; and with something of that feeling, perhaps, against which her father had warned them all, and which leads young ladies at Clifton to fancy that young ladies in Devonshire must be greatly behind-hand in all things, she somehow or other took it for granted that it was very unlikely Agnes Willoughby should have learned to play or sing.

When the time-piece on the chimney struck three, there seemed to be a general movement among the Peters family, indicative of another *sortie*.

"I suppose you walk again, mother?" said the young man.

"I suppose so, James. I dare say Mrs. Barnaby will like to go to the library and put her name down at the rooms."

"Oh yes! . . . . I shall, indeed, ... for poor Agnes's sake! . . . ."

"Very well; that is all quite right. . . . You and I are smart enough, Mrs. Barnaby, but I suppose the girls will choose to change their walking bonnets for bonnets for the walk, and we must wait for them. Here are all the annuals, I believe, ... and I am deep in this review."

So saying, Mrs. Peters threw aside her shawl, seated herself in a low bee-hive that just fitted her little person, and "happified" herself with a biting article in the Quarterly.

Mrs. Barnaby smilingly turned to the piles of pretty books that decorated the loo-table; but hardly had the young ladies disappeared, and Mrs. Peters occupied herself, than she rose, and silently glided out of the room.

Agnes had no better bonnet to put on than

the one she had already displayed, but she ran up stairs with the other girls, because one of them had put out a hand inviting her to do so, and it was therefore to one of their rooms she went, instead of her own: another step this, and a very considerable one too, towards intimacy between young ladies; for few things produce a more genial flow of talk than the being surrounded by a variety of objects in which all parties take a common interest.

Had Mrs. Barnaby been upon this occasion a little less humble-minded in her estimate of her own charms, it would have been better for her; but, unfortunately, a restless spirit within whispered to her that she was not quite beautiful enough for the "walk," and the "library," and the "rooms," and it was to refresh her rouge a little, that she followed the young ladies up stairs.

Now her rouge had been decidedly sufficient before, and moreover, after she had touched up her bloom to the point she deemed to be the most advantageous, it struck her that her lavender and black bonnet and plumes

looked sombre, and would be rendered infinitely more becoming by introducing among the blonde beneath a few bright blossoms of various colours; so that, when she re-entered the drawing-room, she looked precisely like a clever caricature of what she had been when she left it,—the likeness not lost, but all that touched upon the ridiculous or *outré* brought out and exaggerated.

Mrs. Peters looked up as she entered, and gave her one steady glance, then rose from her chair and rang the bell.

The young people were all seated in array, waiting for the widow's re-appearance as a signal to depart, and all rose together as she entered; but they had yet longer to wait, for Mrs. Peters, after ringing the bell, quietly reseated herself, and prepared to resume her book, saying,—

"Upon second thoughts, dear friends, I think we shall do better if we order the carriage, and take Mrs. Barnaby and Miss Willoughby to Bristol. The library and all that will be within five minutes' walk of their lodg-

ings, and as they leave us to-morrow, it will be making better use of our time to go to Bristol to-day." At this moment a servant entered, and the determined little lady, without waiting to hear any opinions on her proposal, desired to know if the coachman was in the house.

"Yes, ma'am," was the reply.

"Then tell him to bring the carriage round as quickly as he can. . . . You may give Miss Willoughby another song, Lucy, in the interval. I want you, Mary, in my room for a moment." . . . . And Mrs. Peters left the room, followed by her eldest daughter.

"Have I puzzled you, Mary?" said she, laughing, and closing the door of the dressing-room as soon as they had entered it. . . ."Don't think me whimsical, child, but upon my word I cannot undertake to parade that painted and plumaged giantess through Clifton. I will sacrifice myself for a two hours' purgatory, and listen with the patience of a martyr to the record of her graces, her virtues, and her dignity, but it must be in the close carriage. I always prefer performing my penances in pri-

vate. Elizabeth evidently believes in her, and I really think admires her beauty into the bargain; so she had better go with us, for I presume, Mary, you have no wish to be of the party?"

"Oh yes, I will certainly go, if Agnes does .... But, mamma, I hope you won't take a fancy against our being a great deal with Miss Willoughby. I will agree in all you may choose to say against this overwhelming aunt Barnaby, but it would grieve me to be rude to her charming niece. She is, I do assure you, the very sweetest creature I ever made acquaintance with."

"It is evident that you have taken a great fancy *for* her, ... and, upon the whole, it is a fancy that does you honour, for it clearly proves you to be exempt from the littleness of fearing a rival.... There is not a single girl in the neighbourhood that can be compared to her in beauty—I am quite ready to acknowledge that; .... but you must excuse me, Mary, if I doubt the possibility of my sympathizing with you in

your general and unqualified admiration of a young lady brought up by my portentous sister Barnaby."

"But Agnes Willoughby was not brought up by her, mamma .... quite the contrary. .... You laugh, mamma, but I do assure you ...."

"I laugh at your '*quite the contrary*,' which means, I suppose, that she has been brought *down* by her; and you will be brought down too, my dear, if you suffer yourself to be identified with her and her rouge in public."

"Identified with Mrs. Barnaby? .... I am quite sure that I do not like her at all better than you do; and I will make myself into a porcupine, and set up my quills at her whenever she comes near me, if you wish it; but then, on your side, you must promise".... and the young lady took her mother's hand very coaxingly .... "you must promise to take the trouble of talking a little to Agnes .... will you?"

"Yes, I will, if I have an opportunity; ....

and I am sure, if she is good for anything, I pity her. . . . Now, then, let us go down again, and you shall see how well I will behave."

Before they reached the drawing-room, however, Mary Peters had conceived a project of her own. She knew what sort of a drive it would be when her mother was "behaving well" to a person she disliked, and she instantly addressed a whispered request to Agnes that she would stay at home, and chat, instead of going to Bristol,

"If I may!". . . . replied Agnes, colouring with pleasure at the proposal; but the yoke upon her young neck was far from being as easy a one as that by which Mrs. Peters guided her daughters, and she felt so much doubt of obtaining permission if she asked it herself, that she added, "Will you ask for me?"

"Mrs. Barnaby," said her courageous friend, "you must do without your niece during your drive, if you please, for she is going to look over my portfolios."

"You are excessively kind, my dear Mary!" replied the benign Mrs. Barnaby, too well satis-

fied at displaying herself in her beloved sister's carriage to care three straws what became of her niece the while. "I am sure Agnes can never be sufficiently grateful for all your kindness."

The delighted Agnes instantly disembarrassed herself of all out-of-door appurtenances, and Lucy, without saying a word about it, quietly did the same. The carriage was announced, the radiant widow stalked forth, Mrs. Peters took Elizabeth by the arm, and followed her, shaking her head reproachfully at Lucy as she passed her, and the young man escorted them down stairs; but having placed them in the carriage, he declined following them, saying,—

"I dare say my father will be glad of the drive home, for it is quite hot to-day. — You will be sure to find him at the Exchange Coffee-house if you get there by half-past four .... A pleasant ride! .... Good morning!" and the next moment he joined the happy trio in the drawing-room.

"And what shall we do with ourselves?" said he. "Would Miss Willoughby like to

promenade among the beaux and belles? Or will she let us keep her all to ourselves, and take another delightful country walk with us? Which do you vote for, Miss Willoughby."

"For the country walk, decidedly," she replied.

"Then let us go down by the zig-zag, and walk under the rocks," said Lucy; and in another minute they were *en route* for that singular and (despite the vile colour of the water) most beautiful river-path.

The enjoyment of this second ramble was not less to Agnes than that of the first, for, if the newness of the scenery was past, the newness of her companions was past too; and she suffered herself to talk, with all the open freedom of youth and innocence, of her past life, upon which Mary, with very friendly skill, contrived to question her; for she was greatly bent upon discovering the source and cause of the widely different tone of mind which her acuteness had discovered between Mrs. Barnaby and her protegée. This walk fully sufficed to explain it; for though Agnes would have shrunk into im-

penetrable reserve had she been questioned about her aunt Barnaby, she opened her heart joyfully to all inquiries respecting Empton, and the beloved Wilmots; nor was she averse, when asked if Mrs. Barnaby had placed her with these very delightful people, to expatiate upon the eccentric character of her half-known aunt Betsy. On the contrary, this was a subject upon which she loved to dwell, because it puzzled her. The one single visit she had made to Miss Compton in her bower, with the simple but delicious repast which followed it . . . . the old lady's marked kindness to herself, her mysteriously rude manner to her aunt Martha, ... the beauty of her bower, the prettiness of her little parlour, had all left a sort of vague and romantic impression upon her mind, which no subsequent interviews had tended to render more intelligible. And all this she told, and with it the fact that it was this same dear, strange, variable aunt Compton, who had placed her in the care of Mrs. Wilmot.

"Miss Compton of Compton Basett," repeated Mary; "that is a mighty pretty aristo-

cratic designation. Your aunt Betsy is an old spinster of large fortune, I presume?"

"Why, no, I don't believe she is; indeed, my aunt Barnaby says she is very poor, but that she might have been a great deal richer had she not given so much of her property to the poor; .... but I wish I knew something more of her.... I cannot help thinking that, with all her oddities, I should like her very much. There is one thing very strange about her," she added musingly, "she is quite deformed, quite crooked, and yet I think she is one of the most agreeable-looking persons I ever saw in my life."

"She has a handsome face, perhaps?" said Lucy.

"No, I believe not. She is very pale, and her face is small, and there is nothing very particular in her features; but yet, somehow or other, I love dearly to look at her."

"The force of contrast, perhaps?" whispered James to his eldest sister.

"No doubt of it," she replied.

And thus they walked and talked, till it

was quite time to turn back, and though their pace was somewhat accelerated, it was as much as they could do to get home in time to dress for their six o'clock dinner.

But the walk was not only agreeable, but profitable to Agnes, for at the end of it Miss Peters felt fully prepared to give a reason for her confidence relative to the cause of the dissimilarity between Mrs. Barnaby and her niece.

CHAPTER XVII.

MRS. BARNABY TAKES POSSESSION OF HER LODGINGS, AND SETS ABOUT MAKING HERSELF COMFORTABLE. — SHE OPENS HER PLANS A LITTLE TO AGNES, AND GIVES HER SOME EXCELLENT ADVICE.—THE COMFORT OF A MID-SUMMER FIRE. — THE APARTMENT OF AGNES SET IN ORDER.—A LECTURE ON USEFULNESS.— VIRTUOUS INDIGNATION.

The following morning Mrs. Peters took care, without being particularly rude, that a movement of some activity "to speed the parting guest," should be perceptible in her household. Mr. Peters took a very kind leave of both ladies at breakfast, and expressed a very friendly wish of being useful to them as long as they should remain at Clifton ; but his judicious lady, who generally knew, without any discourtesy, how to make him perceive that his first impressions were somewhat less

acute than her own, had pointed out to him a few peculiarities in Mrs. Barnaby, which he certainly did not approve. The principal of these, perhaps, was that of her rouging, which for some time he steadfastly refused to believe, declaring that her complexion was the most beautiful he ever saw; but when, his examination being sharpened, he could withhold his belief no longer, he ingenuously confessed he did not like it, and allowed that, though he thought it would be great folly to lose the fine fortune she had promised them on that account, he certainly thought he should feel more comfortable when the rouge pots were all gone into lodgings, because they were articles he did not wish to put in the way of his girls.

As soon as Mr. Peters had taken his leave, the footman was very audibly instructed to order a porter to come for Mrs. Barnaby's luggage; "And let it be before the hall dinner, Stephen, that William may be able to walk beside the things, and see that none of them are dropped by the way."

And then Mrs. Barnaby was very kindly

asked if she would not like to send her maid to see that a fire was lighted in the drawing-room, and that anything she wanted for dinner might be ordered in? . . . . And then the thoughtful Mrs. Peters proposed, after Betty Jacks had been gone about an hour, that James should go to the lodgings, and that they should not set off themselves till he came back and gave notice that everything was ready and comfortable.

In short, Mrs. Barnaby, her niece, her maid, and all their travelling baggage, were safely deposited at No. 1, Sion Row, before the clock struck three.

The widow looked about her when she first got into her own drawing-room very much as if she did not know how she got there. She was puzzled and mystified by the tactics of Mrs. Peters. Delighted beyond all bounds of moderation in finding the family so infinitely higher in station than she had anticipated, her first idea, on perceiving what a land of milk and honey she had fallen into, was to exert all her fascinating talents to enable her to stay

there as long as possible. But the conviction that this scheme would not take, came upon her, she hardly knew how. She had not the slightest inclination to persuade herself that the "dear Margaret" was otherwise than civil to her, yet she felt as if she was to be kept in order, and neither go, nor stay, except as she might receive permission; but, finally, she contrived to heal the wound her vanity had thus received by believing that Mrs. Peters's high fashion, and superior knowledge of life, naturally rendered her manners unlike any she had hitherto been acquainted with, and consequently that she might occasionally mistake her meaning.

Upon the whole, however, she began her Clifton campaign in very good spirits. The Peterses must be extremely useful acquaintance, and might be safely boasted of anywhere as dear and near relations. This was very different from arriving, as she had done, at Exeter, without a chance of making a single acquaintance besides her dress-maker. Moreover, she had got through the difficulty of throwing off

her weeds admirably; she had managed matters so that the dress of Agnes should be perfectly respectable, and yet cost her nothing for a twelvemonth; she had just received a quarter's income without any deduction, and, to crown all, "she never was in better looks in her life."

Short, then, was the interval of discomfort that kept her inactive on first entering her lodgings. "It was not quite such a drawing-room as that of Mrs. Peters, to be sure, but it was the most fashionable part of Clifton; and with her management, and admirable ways of contriving things, she should soon make it extremely *lady-like*."

"Well, now then we must set to work, Agnes," . . . . she said, drawing off her gloves. "Come, Jerningham, you must not stand looking out of the window, child; there is an immense deal to do before we can be comfortable. And the first thing will be to get all the trunks up, those that came by the waggon, and those that came with us."

"Then I 'm sure, ma'am," replied the wait-

ing-maid, "I don't know where you 'll find room to put 'em."

"They must all be brought in here, Jerningham, to begin; and when I have got all my own things unpacked, we must see how we shall be off about drawers, and closets, and pegs, and all that; and then the empty trunks and boxes must be carried into your garret, Jerningham, or into that little room inside mine, that I mean to give up to Agnes."

"To me, aunt? . . . . How very kind!" exclaimed her niece, delighted beyond measure at the idea of some place, no matter what, where she might be alone.

"Yes, my dear. . . . You have not seen the rooms yet; come with me, Agnes, while Jerningham goes down about the trunks, and I will shew you our apartments."

"But what am I to do then, ma'am, about the trunks?" said Betty Jacks in a fit of despair; "I 'm sure I can't carry 'em up any how."

"Then ask the people of the house to help you."

"Why, there 's only the old lady and one maid, ma'am, and I 'm sure they can't and they won't."

Mrs. Barnaby meditated for a moment, and then drew out her purse. "Here is sixpence, Jerningham: go to the next public-house, and hire a man to bring up my boxes. It is immensely expensive, Agnes, this moving about, and we really must be very careful! . . . . Of course, my dear, you do not want any dinner after the Rodney Place luncheon? I took care to take a couple of glasses of wine on purpose; and you should remember, my dear, that I have every earthly thing to pay for you, and never neglect an opportunity of sparing me when you can. After we have done our unpacking we can dress, and go out to the pastrycook's—there is hardly anything I like better than cakes—and you can have a biscuit, you know, if you should want anything before tea."

The majestic lady then led the way to their "apartments," which consisted of a small bedroom behind the drawing-room, and a very small closet, with a little camp-bed behind that.

"Here, my dear, is the room I intend for you. It is, I believe, generally used for a servant, but I have been at the expense of hiring a garret for Jerningham on purpose that you might have the comfort of this. In fact, that bed of mine is not larger than I like for myself, and the drawers, and all that, are not at all more than I shall want; so remember, if you please, not to let any single article of yours, great or small, be ever seen in my room; I shall be puzzled enough, I am sure, as it is, to find room for my own things. You have a great advantage over me there, Agnes; .... that fancy of yours for keeping yourself in deep mourning makes it so easy for you to find space enough for everything."

"Oh yes!" replied Agnes joyfully, "everything shall be put into the closet. What very pleasant lodgings these are, aunt .... so much better than those at Exeter! It is such a nice closet this, and I am so much obliged to you for giving it up to me!"

"I shall be always ready to make sacrifices for you, Agnes, so long as you continue to be-

have well. Here come some of the boxes .... now then, you must kneel down and help to unpack them."

It was a long and a wearisome task that unpacking, and often did Agnes, as the sun shone in upon them while they performed it, think of her pleasant walks with her new friends, and long to breathe again the air that blew upon her as she stood on the top of St. Vincent's rocks.

Mrs. Barnaby, on the contrary, was wholly present to the work before her; and though she waxed weary and warm before it was completed, her spirits never flagged, but appeared to revive within her at every fresh deposit of finery that she came upon, and again and again did she call upon Agnes and Jerningham to admire the skill with which she had stowed them.

At length the work was done, and every disposable corner of her room filled; under the bed, over the bed, in the drawers, and upon the drawers, not an inch remained unoccupied by some of the widow's personalities.

It was by this time so late that the cake

scheme was given up, and the drawing-room being restored to order, the two ladies sat down to tea. It was then that Mrs. Barnaby's genius displayed itself in sketching plans for the future: she had learned from Mrs. Peters and the simple-minded Elizabeth, during their drive to and from Bristol, all particulars respecting the Clifton balls, and moreover that the Peters family seldom failed to attend them.

"This will be quite enough to set us going respectably: people that come in their own carriage, must have influence. I trust that those stupid humdrums, the Wilmots, gave you some dancing lessons, Agnes?"

"Yes, aunt."

"You are always so short in your answers, you never tell me anything. Do you think you could get through a quadrille without blundering?"

"Yes, I hope so, aunt."

"Remember, if you can't, I shall be most dreadfully angry, for it would destroy all my plans entirely.—I mean, Agnes, that you shall

dance as much as possible;—nothing extends one's acquaintance among young men so much. I am not quite sure myself about dancing. I don't think I shall do it here, on account of dear Margaret . . . . perhaps she might think it too soon. I shall probably take to cards; that 's not a bad way of making acquaintance either; but in all things remember that you play into my hands, and whenever you have a new partner remember that you always say to him, 'You must give me leave to introduce you to my aunt' . . . . Do you hear me, Agnes?"

"Yes, aunt," replied the poor girl with an involuntary sigh.

"What a poor, stupid creature you are, to be sure!" returned Mrs. Barnaby in a tone of much displeasure. "What in the world can you sigh for now, just at the very moment that I am talking to you of balls and dancing? I wish to Heaven you were a little more like what I was at your age, Agnes! Be so good as to tell me what you are sighing for?"

"I don't know, aunt; I believe I am tired."

"Tired? . . . . and of what, I should like to know? Come, come, let us have no fine lady airs, if you please; and don't look as if you were going to cry, whatever you do. There is nothing on earth I dislike so much as gloom. I am of a very cheerful, happy temper myself, and it 's perfect misery to me to see anybody look melancholy. . . . I declare, Agnes, I am as hungry as a hound! . . . . I don't like to ring for Jerningham again, she looked so horridly cross; and I wish, my dear, you would just toast this round of bread for me. Mrs. Peters was quite right about the fire . . . . it is such a comfort! and coals are so cheap here. . . . Let me stir it up a little . . . . there, now its as bright as a furnace; you can just kneel down in the middle here upon the rug."

Agnes obeyed, and after some minutes' assiduous application to the labour imposed, she presented the toasted bread, her own fair face scarcely less changed in tint by the operation.

"Gracious me, child! what a fright you have made of yourself! . . . . you should have held the other hand up before your face. . . . You

are but a clumsy person, I am afraid, at most things, as well as at satin-stitch. Will you have some more tea, my dear?" . . . . draining, as was her habit, the last drop into her own cup before she asked the question, and then extending her hand to that genial source of hospitality, the tepid urn.

"No more, thank you, aunt. . . . I will go now, if you please, and take all my things out of your way . . . . and I shall make my closet so comfortable! . . . ."

"I dare say you will. But stay a moment, Agnes: if you find you have more room than you want, do put my two best bonnet-boxes somewhere or other among your things, so that I can get at them . . . . so that Jerningham can get at them, I mean, easily."

"I will, if I can, aunt, but I am afraid there will hardly be room for my chair. However, you shall come and see, if you please, yourself, and then you will be the best judge; but I will go first, and get everything in order."

"Very well, then, Agnes, you may tell Jerningham to separate everything like mourning

from my things, and give it all to you. And you must contrive, my dear, to cut and make up everything to fit yourself, for I really can be at no expense about it. It is perfectly incredible how money goes in this part of the country, so different from our dear Silverton! . . . . However, I will not grumble about it, for I consider it quite my duty to bring you out into the world, and I knew well enough before I set out, that it could not be done for nothing. But it is a sort of self-devotion I shall never complain of, if you do but turn out well."

Agnes was standing while this affectionate speech was spoken, and having quietly waited for its conclusion, again uttered her gentle "thank you, aunt," and retired to arrange the longed-for paradise of her little closet.

Darkness overtook her before she had fully completed her task; but, perhaps, she wilfully lingered over it, for it kept her alone, and permitted her bright and innocent spirit to indulge itself by recalling all the delight she had felt in looking down upon the bold and beautiful scenery of the Avon, and she blessed Heaven

for the fund of happiness she was now conscious existed within her, since the power of looking out upon Nature seemed sufficient to produce a joy great enough to make her forget aunt Barnaby, and everything else that gave her pain. A part, too, of her hours of light, was spent in opening more than one of her dear little volumes to seek for some remembered description of scenery which she thought would be more intelligible to her now than heretofore; and as Spenser happened to fall into her hands, it was no great wonder if his flowery meads and forests drear, tempted her onwards till she almost lost herself among them.

At length, however, she had done all that she thought she could do towards giving a closet the appearance of a room; and having stowed her tiny looking-glass out of the way, and placed pens, ink, and a book or two, on the rickety little table in its stead, she looked round in the dusky twilight with infinite satisfaction, and thought, that were she quite sure of taking a long country walk about three times a week with the Peterses, she should be very,

very happy, let everything else go on as it might.

Having come to this satisfactory conclusion, (for a walk three times a week was an indulgence she might reasonably hope for,) she cast one fond look round upon her dark but dear solitude, and then went to rejoin her aunt in the drawing-room, and announce its state of perfection to her. She found her seated at the open window.

"What have you been about, Agnes, all this time?" she said. "It is lucky that my cheerful, happy temper, does not make solitude as dreadful to me as it is to most people, or I should be badly off, living with you. You are but a stupid, moping sort of a body, my dear, I must say, or you would have guessed that there was more to see at the front of the house than at the back of it. I declare I never saw such a delightful window as this in my life. You would never believe what a mall there has been here from the moment I took my place till just now, that it 's got almost dark; . . . . and even now, Agnes, if you will come here," . . . .

she added in a whisper, ... "but don't speak . . . . you may see one couple left, and lovers they are, I'll be bound for them . . . . Here, stand here by me."

"No, thank you, aunt," said Agnes, retreating; "I don't want to see them, and I think it is more comfortable by the fire."

"You don't choose to spoil sport, I suppose; . . . . but don't be such a fool, and pretend to be wiser than your betters. Come here, I say; you shall take one peep, I am determined."

And as this determination was enforced by a tolerably strong pull, Agnes yielded, and found herself, greatly against her inclination, standing at the open window, with her head obligingly thrust out of it by her resolute aunt.

The lamps were by this time lighted, and at that moment a remarkably tall, gentleman-like looking personage passed beneath one that stood almost immediately below the window, receiving its full glare upon his features. Beside him was a lady, and a young one, slight, tall, and elegant-looking, who more than leaned upon his arm, for her head almost reclined upon

his shoulder; and, as they passed, Agnes saw his hand raised to her face, and he seemed to be playing with her ringlets.

Agnes forcibly withdrew her head, while Mrs. Barnaby threw herself half out of the window for a minute, then drew back, laughing heartily, and shut down the sash.

"That 's capital!" .... she cried; "they fancied themselves so very snug. But wasn't he a fine figure of a man, Agnes? I never saw a finer fellow in my life. He 's taller than Tate by half a head, I am sure. But you 're right about the fire too, for the wind comes over that down uncommonly cold. I shall go to work for an hour, and then have a little bread and cheese and a pint of beer."

Mrs. Barnaby suited the action to the word, and unlocked her work-box, in which she found ready to her hand good store of work prepared for her beloved needle.

"Now, only see, Agnes, what a thing it would have been for you, if you had learned to work satin-stitch!" she said. "Here am I, happy and amused, and before I go to bed

I dare say I shall have done a good inch of this beautiful collar . . . . And only look at yourself! What earthly use are you of to anybody? . . . .I wonder you are not ashamed to sit idle in that way, while you see me hard at work."

"May I get a book, aunt?"

"Books, books, books! . . . . If there is one thing more completely full of idleness than another, it is reading,—just spelling along one line after another. . . . And what comes of it? Now, here 's a leaf done already, and wait a minute and you 'll see a whole bunch of grapes done in spotting. There is some sense in that: but poring over a lot of rubbishly words is an absolute sin, for it is wasting the time that Heaven gives us, and doing no good to our fellow-creatures."

"And the grapes!" thought Agnes, but she said nothing.

"Why don't you answer when I speak to you, child? . . . . Did that stupid Mrs. Wilmot never tell you to speak when you were spoken to? . . . . What a different creature you

would have been if I had had the placing you, instead of that crooked, frumpish old maid! . . . . But I am sadly afraid it is too late now to hope that you will ever be good for much."

"I should be very glad to try to make myself competent for the situation of a governess, aunt, as you once mentioned to me," replied Agnes.

"Oh! by the by, I want to speak to you about that. You are not to say one word on that subject here, remember, nor indeed anywhere, till at such time as I shall give you leave. It will be cruelly hard for me to have the monstrous expense of maintaining you, exactly as if you were my own child, and not have the credit of it. And, besides I don't, feel quite sure that I shall send you out as a governess . . . . it must depend upon circumstances. Perhaps I shall get you married, and that might suit me just as well. All you have to do is to keep yourself always ready to go out at a minute's warning, if I say the word; but you need mention it to nobody, and particularly not to my relations here."

"Very well, aunt .... I will say nothing about it. But in order to be ready when you say the word, I think I ought to study a good deal, and I am willing to do it if you will give me leave."

"How you do plague me, child, about your learning! Push the candles this way, can't you, and snuff them, when you see me straining my poor eyes with this fine work. . . . And do you know, miss, I think it 's very likely those books you are so mighty fond of are nothing in the world but trumpery story-books, for I don't believe you 'd hanker after them so, if they were really in the teaching line. For, after all, Agnes, if I must speak the truth, I don't believe you ever did pay attention to any single thing that could be really useful in the way of governessing. Now, music, for instance, nobody ever heard you say a word about that; and you ought to sing too, if you wer'n't more stupid than anything ever was, for both your father and mother sang like angels."

"I can sing a little, aunt," said Agnes.

"There, now, ... isn't it as plain as pos-

sible that you take no pleasure in it? . . . . though everybody said your poor dear mother could have made her fortune by singing. But you care for nothing but books, books, books! . . . . and what profit, I should like to know, will ever come of that?"

"But I do care very much indeed for music, aunt," said Agnes eagerly, "only I did not talk about it, because I thought it might not be convenient for you to have an instrument for me. But I believe I could learn to get my bread by music, if I had a pianoforte to study with."

"Grant me patience! . . . . And you really want me to go and get you a piano-forte, which is just the most expensive thing in the world?. . . . And that after I had so kindly opened my heart to you about my fears of not having money enough!. . . . I do think that passes anything I ever heard in my life!"

"Indeed, aunt, I never would have said a word about it if . . . . "

"If? . . . . if what, I should like to know? Heaven knows it is seldom I lose my temper about

anything, but it *is* almost too much to hear you ask me to my face to ruin myself in that way, ... and you without a chance of ever having a penny to repay me !"

"Pray forget it, aunt ! . . . . Indeed I do not wish to be an expense to you, and will very gladly try to labour for my own living, if you will let me."

"Mighty fine, to be sure ! . . . . Much you 're good for, ar'n't you ? . . . . I wish you 'd get along to bed. My temper is too good to bear malice, and I shall forget all about it to-morrow, perhaps ; but I can't abide to look at you to-night after such a speech as that . . . . there 's the truth ; . . . . so get to bed, that 's a good girl, as fast as you can. . . . There are some things too much even for an angel to bear !"

Agnes crept to her little bed, and soon cried herself to sleep.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CONDITIONS OF AN AGREEMENT BETWEEN MRS. PETERS AND HER DAUGHTERS.—MRS. BARNABY BEGINS HER FASHIONABLE CAREER UNDER THE PROTECTION OF MISS ELIZABETH.—SHE REHEARSES A BALL IN HER HEART AS SHE EXAMINES THE ROOM.—THE LIBRARY.

Mrs. Barnaby was quite right in thinking that the Peters family would be very useful acquaintance; for prodigiously as Mrs. Peters disliked her sister-in-law, she no sooner ceased to be galled by her unwelcome presence in her house, than she recovered her good-humour, and felt as much aware as any reasonable person could desire, of the claim her brother's widow really had upon her and her family. These excellent dispositions were assiduously fostered by her daughters, to whose wishes she never turned a deaf ear. She found the

eldest and the youngest very seriously interested in Agnes, and earnest in their desire to see more of her; while Elizabeth persevered in her belief that poor Mrs. Barnaby was one of the very best-hearted women in the world, and very much to be pitied, because nobody seemed to like her . . . . though she *did* mean to divide her fortune so generously amongst them.

"I hope, mamma," said the eldest Miss Peters, when the ladies of the family were sitting round the drawing-room fire after dinner, "I hope that you will overcome your terror of Mrs. Barnaby and her rouge sufficiently before Tuesday night to permit her joining our party in the ball-room, for I would not forsake that sweet Agnes upon such an occasion for more than I will say."

"Why, I do feel my spirits revive, Mary, considerably, since I have felt quite certain that none of my dear sister's amiable feelings were likely to involve me in the necessity of enduring her presence in my house for evermore. You may fancy you exaggerate, perhaps, when you

talk of my terrors; . . . . but no such thing, believe me. It was terror she inspired, and nothing short of it."

"And Agnes, mamma? . . . . what did she inspire?" said Mary.

"Pity and admiration," replied her mother.

"Very well, then," returned the petted girl, kissing her, "we shall not quarrel this time; but I was half afraid of it. It would, in truth, have been very foolish, and very unlike you, mamma, who understand the sort of thing better than most people, I believe, if we had lost the great pleasure of being kind to Miss Willoughby, and behaved extremely ill to uncle Barnaby's widow into the bargain, solely because you don't like tall massive ladies, with large black eyes, who wear rouge, and talk fine; . . . . for you must confess, if you will be quite honest and speak the truth, that Mrs. Peters is rather too well-established a person at Clifton, to fear losing caste by being seen with a Mrs. Barnaby, even had the association not been redeemed by the matchless elegance of her beautiful niece."

"Did any one ever hear a mamma better scolded?" said Mrs. Peters, turning to the younger girls.

"Mary is quite right, mamma," said Lucy. "Depend upon it we should have broken into open rebellion, had you persevered in threatening to cut the Barnaby connexion."

"Indeed I must say," added Elizabeth, "that I have thought you very severe upon our poor aunt, mamma. Think of her kindness!"

"Our aunt!" sighed Mrs. Peters. "Is it absolutely necessary, beloveds! that she should be addressed in public by that tender title?"

"Not absolutely, perhaps," replied Mary, laughing; "and I dare say Elizabeth will make a bargain with you, mamma, never to call her aunt again, provided you promise never to forget that she is our aunt, though we may not call her so."

"And what must I do, young ladies, to prove my eternal recollection of this agreeable fact?"

"You must be very civil to Agnes, and let

them both join our party at tea, and at all the balls, and never object to our calling upon the Barnaby, for the sake of getting at the Willoughby, and . . . . now don't start, and turn restive, mamma, ... you must ask them whenever we have an evening party here with young people, that might be likely to give Agnes pleasure."

"And must I embrace Mrs. Barnaby every time she comes into my presence, and every time she leaves it?"

"No, ... unless you have done something so very outrageously rude before, as to render such a penitentiary *amende* necessary."

"Come here, Mary," said the gay mother, "and let me box your ears immediately."

The young lady placed herself very obediently on the foot-stool at Mrs. Peters's feet, who having patted each pretty cheek, said, "Now tell me, Mary, if you can, what it is that has thus fascinated your affections, hoodwinked your judgment, perverted your taste, and extinguished your pride?"

"If you will let me turn your questions my

own way, mother," replied the daughter, "I will answer them all. My affection is fascinated, or, I would rather say, won, by the most remarkable combination of beauty, grace, talent, gentleness, and utter unconsciousness of it all, that it has ever been my hap to meet with. And, instead of being hoodwinked, my judgment, my power of judging, seem newly roused and awakened by having so very fine a subject on which to exercise themselves. I never before felt, as I did when listening to Agnes as she innocently answered my prying questions concerning her past life, the enormous difference there might be between one human mind and another. It was like opening the pages of some holy book, and learning thence what truth, innocence, and sweet temper could make of us. If admiring the uncommon loveliness of this sweet girl with something of the enthusiasm with which one contemplates a choice picture, be perversion of taste, I plead guilty, for it is with difficulty that I keep my eyes away from her; . . . . and for my pride, mamma, ... if any feeling of the kind ever so poisoned my

heart as to make me turn from what was good, in the fear that it might lead me into contact with what was ungenteel, be thankful with me, that this sweet 'light from heaven' has crossed my path, and enabled me to see the error of my ways."

Mary spoke with great animation, and her mother listened to her till tears dimmed her laughing blue eyes.

"You are not a missish miss, Mary, that is certain," said she, kissing her, "and assuredly I thank Heaven for that. This pretty creature does indeed seem by your account to be a pearl of price; but, *par malheur*, she has got into the shell of the very vilest, great, big, coarse, hateful oyster, that ever was fished up! .... Fear nothing more, however, from me. .... You are dear good girls for feeling as you do about this pretty Agnes, and I give you *carte blanche* to do what you will with her and for her."

The consequence of this was an early call made on the following morning at Mrs. Barnaby's lodgings by the three Misses Peters.

There were not many subjects on which the aunt and niece thought or felt in common; but it would be difficult to say which of the two was most pleased when their visiters were announced.

"We are come—that is, Lucy and I — to make you take a prodigious long walk with us, Agnes," said Miss Peters; "and Elizabeth, who is not quite so stout a pedestrian as we are, is come with us, to offer her services to you, Mrs. Barnaby, for a home circuit, if you like to make one. And pray do not forget that Tuesday is the ball night, and that we shall expect you to go, and join our party in the room."

"Dearest Mary! . . . . dearest Elizabeth! . . . . dearest Lucy! How good of you all! Agnes, put on your bonnet, my dear, instantly, and never forget the kindness of these dear girls. . . . I shall, indeed, be thankful to you, Elizabeth, if you will put me in the way of getting a few trifles that will be necessary for Tuesday. . . . Are your balls large? . . . . Are there plenty of gentlemen . . . ." &c. &c.

And where was Agnes's heavy sense of sad-

ness now? The birds, whose cheerful songs seemed to call her out, were not more light of heart than herself, as she followed her friends down the stairs, and sprung through the door to meet the fresh breeze from the down with a foot almost as elastic as their own glad wings. We must leave the young ladies to pursue their way, being joined at no great distance from the door by James Peters, through a long and delightful ramble that took them along "the wall," that forms the *garde fou* to the most beautiful point of Durdham Down, and so on amidst fields and villas that appeared to Agnes, like so many palaces in fairy-land; and while thus they charm away the morning, we must follow Mrs. Barnaby and the good-natured Elizabeth through their much more important progress among the fashionable resorts of the Clifton *beau monde*.

"And about tickets, my dear Elizabeth?" said the widow, as she offered her substantial arm to her slight companion; "what is it the fashion to do? To subscribe for the season, or pay at the door?"

"You may do either, Mrs. Barnaby; but if

you wish your arrival to be known, I believe you had better put your name on the book."

"You are quite right, my dear. Where is the place to do this? Cannot you take me at once?"

"Yes, I could take you certainly, for it is almost close by; but perhaps papa had better save you the trouble, Mrs. Barnaby?"

"By no means, my dear. His time is more valuable than mine. Let us go at once: I shall like it best."

Elizabeth, though a little frightened, led the way; and as Mrs. Barnaby entered the establishment that at its very threshold seemed to her redolent of wax-lights, fiddles, and fine clothes, such a delightful flutter of spirits came upon her, as drove from her memory the last fifteen or sixteen years of her life, and made her feel as if she were still one of the lightest and loveliest nymphs in the world. She insisted upon seeing the ball-room, and paced up and down its ample extent with a step that seemed with difficulty restrained from dancing; she examined the arrangement for the music, looked up with exultation at the chandeliers, and

triumphed in anticipation at their favourable influence upon rouge, eyes, feathers, and flowers. Had there been any other man present beside the waiter, she would hardly have restrained her desire to make a *tour de waltz*; and, as it was, she could not help turning to the quiet young man, and saying with a condescending smile, "The company must look very well in this room, sir?"

As they passed in their way out through the room in which the subscription-books were kept, they met a gentleman, whose apparent age wavered between thirty-five and forty, tall, stout, gaily dressed, fully moustached, and with an eye that looked as if accustomed to active service in reconnoitring all things. He took off his hat, and bowed profoundly to Miss Peters, bestowing at the same time a very satisfactory stare on the widow.

"Who is that, my dear?" said the well-pleased lady.

"That is Major Allen," replied Elizabeth.

"Upon my word, he is a very fine, fashionable-looking man. Is he intimate with your family?"

"Oh no! . . . We only know him from meeting him sometimes at parties, and always at the balls."

"Is he a man of fortune?"

"I am sure I don't know. He has got a smart horse and groom, and goes a great deal into company."

"Then of course he cannot be a poor man, my dear. Is he a dancer?"

"No. . . . I believe he always plays cards."

"And where shall we go now, dearest? . . . . I want you to take me, Elizabeth, to all the smartest shops you know."

"Some of the best shops are at Bristol, but we have a very good milliner here."

"Then let us go there, dear. . . . And did not your mamma say something about a library?"

"Yes, there 's the library, and almost everybody goes there almost every morning."

"Then there of course I shall go. I consider it as so completely a duty, my dear Elizabeth, to do all these sort of things for the sake of my niece. My fortune is a very good

one, and the doing as other people of fortune do, must be an advantage to poor dear Agnes as long as she is with me; .... but I don't scruple to say to you, my dear, that the fortune I received from your dear uncle, will return to his family in case I die without children. .... And a truly widowed heart, my dear girl, does not easily match itself again. But the more you know of me, Elizabeth, the more you will find that I have many notions peculiar to myself. Many people, if they were mistress of my fortune, would spend three times as much as I do; but I always say to myself, 'Poor dear Mr. Barnaby, though he loved me better than anything else on earth, loved his own dear sister and her children next best; and therefore, as he left all to me .... and a very fine fortune he made, I assure you .... I hold myself in duty bound, as I spend a great deal of money with one hand upon my own niece, to save a great deal with the other for his.'"

"I am sure you seem to be very kind and good to everybody," replied the grateful young lady.

"That is what I would wish to be, my dear, for it is only so that we can do our duty. . . . Not that I would ever pledge myself never to marry again, my dear Elizabeth. I don't at all approve people making promises that it may be the will of Heaven they should break afterwards; and those people are not the most likely to keep a resolution, who vow and swear about it. But I hope you will never think me stingy, my dear, nor let anybody else think me so, for not spending above a third of my income, or perhaps not quite so much; for, now you know my motives, you must feel that it would be very ungenerous, particularly in your family, to blame me for it."

"It would indeed, Mrs. Barnaby, and it is what I am sure that I, for one, should never think of doing. . . . But this is the milliner's . . . . Shall we go in?"

"Oh yes! . . . . A very pretty shop, indeed; quite in good style. What a sweet turban! . . . . If it was not for the reasons that I tell you, I should certainly be tempted, Elizabeth. Pray, ma'am, what is the price of this scarlet turban?"

"Four guineas and a half, ma'am, with the bird, and two guineas without it."

"It is a perfect gem! Pray, ma'am, do you ever make up ladies' own materials?"

"No, ma'am, never," replied the decisive *artiste*.

"Do you never fasten in feathers?. . . . I should not mind paying for it, as I see your style is quite first-rate."

"For our customers, ma'am, and whenever the feathers or the coiffure have been furnished in the first instance by ourselves."

"You are a customer, Elizabeth, are you not?"

"Mamma is," replied the young lady. "You know Mrs. Peters of Rodney Place, Mrs. Duval?"

"Oh yes! . . . I beg your pardon, Miss Peters. Is this lady a friend of yours?"

"Mrs. Peters is my sister-in-law, Mrs. Duval, and I hope that will induce you to treat me as if I had already been a customer. I should like to have some feathers, that I mean to wear at the ball on Tuesday, fastened into my toque, like these in this blue one here. Will you do this for me?"

"Yes, ma'am, certainly, if you will favour us with your name on our books."

"That 's very obliging, and I will send my own maid with it as soon as I get home."

"Is there anything else I can have the pleasure of shewing you, ladies?"

"I want some long white gloves, if you please, and something light and elegant in the way of a scarf."

The *modiste* was instantly on the alert, and the counter became as a sea of many-coloured waves.

"Coloured scarves are sometimes worn in slight mourning, I believe, are they not?"

"Oh yes! ma'am, always."

"What do you say to this one, Elizabeth?" said the widow, selecting one of a brilliant geranium tint.

"For yourself, Mrs. Barnaby?"

"Yes, my dear. . . . My dress will be black satin, you know."

"I should think white would look better," said Elizabeth, recollecting her mother's aversion to fine colours, and recollecting also the recent weeds of her widowed aunt.

"Well, ... perhaps it might. Let me see some white, if you please."

"Perhaps you would like blonde, ma'am?" said the milliner, opening a box, and displaying some tempting specimens.

"Beautiful indeed! . . . . very! . . . . What is the price of this one?"

"A mere trifle, ma'am. . . . Give me leave to begin your account with this."

"Well, I really think I must. . . . I know they clean as good as new."

"What is Agnes to wear?" inquired Elizabeth.

"There is one of my troubles, my dear; she will wear nothing but the deepest mourning. Between you and me, Elizabeth, I suspect it is some feeling about her poor mother, or else for her father, who has never been heard of for years, but whom we all suppose to have died abroad,—I suspect it is some feeling of this sort that makes her so very obstinate about it. But she can't bear to have it talked of, so don't say a word to her on the subject, or she will be out of sorts for a week, and will think it very cruel of me to have named it to you.

I perfectly dote upon that girl, Elizabeth, ... though, to be sure, I have my trials with her ! But we have all our trials, Elizabeth ! . . . . and, thank Heaven ! I have a happy temper, and bear mine, I believe, as well as most people. But about that strange whim that Agnes has, of always wearing crape and bombasin, you may as well just mention it to your mamma and sisters, to prevent their taking any notice of it to her; for if they did, you may depend upon it she would not go to the ball at all. . . . Oh ! you have no idea of the obstinacy of that darling girl ! . . . . These gloves will do at last, I think. . . . Your gloves are all so remarkably small, Mrs. Duval ! . . . . And that 's all for this morning."

" Where shall I send them, ma'am, and to what name ?"

" To Mrs. Barnaby, No. 1, Sion Row."

" Thank you, ma'am. . . . They shall be sent immediately."

" Now then, Elizabeth, for the library," said the widow with an expressive flourish of the hand.

And to the library they went, which to

Mrs. Barnaby's great satisfaction was full of smart people, and, amongst others, she had to make her way past the moustached Major Allen, in order to reach the table on which the subscription-book was laid.

"I beg your pardon, madam, a thousand times!" said the Major; "I am afraid I trod on your foot!"

"Don't mention it! . . . . it is of no consequence in the world! The shop is so full, it is almost impossible to avoid it."

The Major in return for this civil speech again fixed his broad, wide, open eyes upon the widow, and she had again the satisfaction of believing that he thought her particularly handsome.

Miss Peters found many of her acquaintance among the crowd, with whom she conversed, while Mrs. Barnaby seated herself at the table, and turned over page after page of autographs with the air of a person deeply interested by the hope of finding the names of friends and acquaintance among them, whereas it would have been a circumstance little short of a miracle had she found there that of any individual whom

she had ever seen in her life; but she performed her part admirably, smiling from time to time, as if delighted at an unexpected recognition. Meanwhile many an eye, as she well knew, was fixed upon her, for her appearance was in truth sufficiently striking. She was tall, considerably above the average height, and large, though not to corpulency; in short, her figure was what many people, like Mr. Peters, would call that of a fine woman; and many others, like Mrs. Peters, would declare to be large, ungainly, and vulgar. Her features were decidedly handsome, her eyes and teeth fine, and her nose high and well-formed; but all this was exaggerated into great coarseness by the quantity of rouge she wore, and the redundance of harsh-looking, coal-black ringlets which depended heavily down each side of her large face, so as still to give a striking resemblance, as Agnes, it may be remembered, discovered several years before, to the wax heads in a hair-dresser's shop. This sort of face and figure, which were of themselves likely enough to draw attention, were rendered still more conspicuous by her dress, which, though, like

herself, really handsome, was rendered unpleasing by its glaring purpose of producing effect. A bonnet of bright lavender satin, extravagantly large, and fearfully thrown back, displayed a vast quantity of blonde quilling, fully planted with flowers of every hue, while a prodigious plume of drooping feathers tossed themselves to and fro with every motion of her head, and occasionally reposed themselves on her shoulder. Her dress was of black silk, but ingeniously relieved by the introduction of as many settings off, of the same colour with her bonnet, as it was well possible to contrive; so that, although in mourning, her general appearance was exceedingly shewy and gay.

"Who is your friend, Elizabeth?" said a young lady, who seemed to have the privilege of questioning freely.

"It is Mrs. Barnaby," replied Miss Peters in a whisper.

"And who is Mrs. Barnaby, my dear? . . . . She has quite the air of a personage."

"She is the widow of mamma's brother, Mr. Barnaby of Silverton."

"Silverton? . . . . That 's the name of her

place, is it ? . . . . She is a lady of large fortune, I presume ?"

"Yes, she is, Miss Maddox," replied Elizabeth, somewhat scandalized by the freedom of these inquiries; "but I really wish you would not speak so loud, for she must hear you."

"Oh no ! . . . . You see she is very busy looking for her friends. Good morning, Major !" said the same fair lady, turning to Major Allen, who stood close beside her, listening to all her inquiries and to the answers they received. "Are we to have a good ball on Tuesday?"

"If all the world can be made to know that Miss Maddox will be there, all the world will assuredly be there to meet her," replied the gentleman.

"Then I commission you to spread the tidings far and near. I wonder if there will be many strangers ?"

"Some of the Stephenson and Hubert party, I hear — that is, Colonel Hubert and young Frederick Stephenson—they are the only ones left. The bridal party set off from the Mall this morning at eleven o'clock. Lady Stephenson looked more beautiful than ever."

"Lady Stephenson? . . . . Oh! Emily Hubert. . . . Yes, she is very handsome; and her brother is vastly like her."

"Do you think so? . . . . He is so thin and weather-beaten . . . . so very like an old soldier."

"I don't like him the worse for that," replied the lady. "He looks as if he had seen service, and were the better for it. He is decidedly the handsomest man at Clifton."

The Major smiled, and turned on his heel, which brought him exactly *vis-à-vis* to Miss Elizabeth Peters.

"Your party mean to honour the ball on Tuesday, I hope, Miss Peters?"

"I believe so, Major Allen. It is seldom that we are not some of us there."

"Shall you bring us the accession of any strangers?" inquired the Major.

"Mrs. Barnaby and her niece will be with us, I think."

"I flatter myself that altogether we shall muster strong. Good morning!" and with another sidelong glance at the widow, Major Allen walked out of the shop.

Not a word of all this had been lost upon Mrs. Barnaby. She had thought from the very first that Elizabeth Peters must be selected as her particular friend, and now she was convinced that she would be invaluable in that capacity. It was quite impossible that any one could have answered better to questions than she had done. It was impossible, too, that anything could be more fascinating than the general appearance of Major Allen; and if, upon farther inquiry, it should prove that he was indeed, as he appeared to be, a man of fashion and fortune, the whole world could not offer her a lover she should so passionately desire to captivate!

Such were the meditations of Mrs. Barnaby as she somewhat pensively sat at her drawing-room window, awaiting the return of Agnes to dinner on that day; and such were very frequently her meditations afterwards.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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